

Annotation and Commentary on Marx's Gothakritik

With Additional Commentary

Anarchblr

Oct.11, 2019 — Dec 19, 2020

Contents

<i>Annotating Gothakritik</i>	3
<i>Commentary on Gothakritik</i>	5
<i>Additional Commentary</i>	9

Annotating *Gothakritik*¹

“Free State — what is this?

It is by no means the aim of the workers [...] to set the State free. [...] [T]oday [...] the forms of State are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the ‘freedom of the State’.

The German Workers’ party — at least if it adopts the program — shows that its socialist ideas are not even skin-deep; in that, instead of treating existing society [...] as the *basis* of the existing State (or of the future State in the case of future society), it treats the State rather as an independent entity that possesses its own intellectual, ethical, and libertarian bases.

[...] [D]ifferent States of the different civilized countries [...] all have this in common: that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one more or less capitalistically developed. They have, therefore, also certain essential characteristics in common. In this sense, it is possible to speak of the ‘present-day State’ in contrast with the future, in which its present root, bourgeois society, will have died off.

The question then arises: What transformation will the State undergo in communist society? [...] [O]ne does not get a flea-hop nearer to the [answer] by a thousand-fold combination of the word ‘people’ [*Volk*] with the word ‘State’ [*Staat*].

[...] Its political demands contain nothing beyond the old democratic litany familiar to all: universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people’s militia, etc. [...] They are all demands which, insofar as they are not exaggerated in fantastic presentation, have already been *realized*. Only the State to which they belong does not lie within the borders of the German Empire, but in Switzerland, the United States, etc. This sort of ‘State of the future’ is a present-day State, although existing outside [...] of the German Empire.

[...] [A]ll those pretty little gewgaws rest on the recognition of the so-called sovereignty of the people and hence are appropriate only in a *democratic republic*.

[...] [O]ne should not have resorted [...] to the subterfuge [...] of demanding things which have meaning only in a democratic republic from a State which is nothing but a police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture, already influenced by the bourgeoisie.

[...] That, in fact, by the word ‘State’ is meant the government machine [...] is shown by the words ‘the German Workers’ party demands as the economic basis of the State: a single progressive income tax’, etc. Taxes are the economic basis of the government machinery and of nothing else. In the State of the future, existing in Switzerland, this demand has been pretty well fulfilled. Income tax presupposes various sources of income of the various social classes, and hence capitalist society. It is, therefore, nothing remarkable that the Liverpool financial reformers [...] are putting forward the same demand as the program.

[...] [T]he whole program, for all its democratic clang, is tainted through and through by the Lassallean sect’s servile belief in the State, or, what is no better, by a democratic belief in miracles;

¹ <https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/632452347867578368/free-state-what-is-this-it-is-by-no-means-the>

or rather it is a compromise between these two kinds of belief in miracles, both equally remote from socialism.”

Commentary on *Gothakritik*¹

The question of whether anarchists and libertarian marxists's postions can be reconciles is not a stupid one, but it is certainly is an uninitiated one;

1. Marxists and Anarchists both are against the State
2. Neither would agree to erecting one

This is a question that socialists of all creeds and calibers have to reckon with, the red republicans have their answer and we have ours.

Libertarian Marxists hide behind the excuse that our differences are 'merely semantic', the burden of this union falls on them as long as they continue to deflect on the nature of the State in this way. It's nothing short of infuriatingly cowardly the way they cling to this excuse; the fact that we have argued over this for this long is indicative that the problem surpasses, spills over, from the semantic. They are not in conversation with Anarchist theories of transformation, revolution, or practice so they *read into* the arguments they have with anarchists their own misconception and then elucidate a victory on these fantastical grounds, ridiculous.

The hurdle they have to overcome is the idea that Marx prescribed a State as an intermediate, as the midwife, of a socialist world —*incorrect*. You can scour Marx' writings, you won't find his advocating a State, proletarian or not.

You point this out to them and they can deflect one of two ways:

1. Citing Engels
2. Citing Critique of the Gotha Programme

That Engels was not Marx' equal is something that I don't even have to point out, Engels himself admits his deficiency and bemoans having to shoulder the weight of being the foremost authority on Marx after his death. He's a good equivocator of Marx but it doesn't *do* to understand an equivocated Marx so we leave behind any one who chooses to follow his footsteps and unto the next.

Most every Marxist worth their salt will be familiar with the *Gothakritik*, as they should; it is one of the few places Marx talks about communism and our coming revolution. Here we find the Marxists right at home, and they, thinking themselves clever, greet us with the words of Marx,

“Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the *State can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.*”

¹ <https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/637897291955683328/do-you-think-its-possible-for-anarchists-and>

[K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme: IV*]

Then we see them join their brothers we just passed,

“Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all!”

[F. Engels, *On Authority*]

Self-satisfied in their own ignorance and drunk with conservatism, they congratulate themselves and give each other a pat on the back, assured that they have just destroyed the Anarchist position; for surely, in their own worldview, if they were wrong, then revolution wouldn't be necessary — a preposterous thought— and thus a State unnecessary, *so they say*.

Very well, we meet them here, unbothered.

Let us look closer at Marx, just before he said what's up above,

“Free State — what is this?”

It is *by no means the aim of the workers*, who have got rid of the narrow mentality of humble subjects, *to set the State free*.”

Could this be any clearer? ***By no means the aim (!) of the workers to set the State free!*** Why, would you look at that, the Marxists scoff but already we are on firmer ground.

Let's proceed then,

The German Workers' party — at least if it adopts the program — shows that its socialist ideas are not even skin-deep; in that [...] it treats the State rather as an independent entity that possesses its own intellectual, ethical, and libertarian bases.

Here, it must be reminded that Marx was critiquing a particular program more akin to a social democracy than actual Socialism, as no doubt the Marxists would deflect, but this piece is *cutting* nevertheless.

Here Marx criticizes the notion that the State is this independent entity with 'its own intellectual, ethical, and libertarian bases.' That is to say, repudiating the idea that the State is independent enough to serve as a haven for liberatory, emancipatory —*socialist*— ideals. Clearly speaking, he bases his socialism on an anti-State position, and considers any deviation from this position as socialism that 'is not even skin-deep'.

Here, we reach closer to our marxist comrades,

“The question then arises: What transformation will the State undergo in communist society?”

And the immediate answer,

“*one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'State'.*”

I know i have to translate this for you, but I really shouldn't have to: ***under absolutely no circumstances is the State a solution to our problem! Especially not of "the workers, who have (gotten) rid of the narrow mentality of humble subjects(!)"***

Don't you see?, For Marx, taking everything that's being said into account,

1. The State is not a revolutionary vehicle by any means!
2. So think it is equates a 'narrow mentality'!

These are Marx' own words.

But we are not done yet!

Finally, we reach Marxists

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the State can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.

We reach a conundrum, if Marx is so deeply opposed to the State, why does he say that it forms a transitional period? Here is where the Marxists get stuck, and because they get stuck they think others can't surpass them. They think their own limitations universal and so we must show them the way through.

First, consider that at no point does Marx actually say that the State *is* the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! Second, that it makes no sense *if he did!*

Think, what makes more sense, with everything we have gone over and learned:

1. That somehow Marx (who, as we've pointed out, considers using the State as 'narrow-minded' and Socialism that does as 'not even skin-deep') makes an exception for the proletariat (despite just having stated that the answer does not lie in the 'thousand-fold combination of the word 'people' with the word 'State'.)?
2. Or that Marx considers the State and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to be two distinct things, of different *quality*, and by no means synonymous?

Voilà!

Thus stated there can be no doubt of which position is correct because only the one is consistent; *the latter one!*

Ah, but now we find that even the Anarchists are perturbed for they understand the implications, the Marxists are scrambling around looking at their notes looking to contradict me, they must find something to oppose me with, something Marx must've said that rectifies their fragile worldview, and no doubt they'll find it but I know all their tricks and know that all they'll find is outdated. The Anarchists, on the other hand, are another matter, here is where I'm distinct from both.

'But even Bakunin rallied against the Dictatorship!' 'You yourself have taken a position against Marx on these grounds' etc.

Patience, friends, we are not done.

To those still confused the problem at first glance seems nowhere near closer to being solved than when we first started, it might seem we merely traded one semantic difference for another. Let us see how we have actually progressed for we simply have to make sense of this revelation is all. Walk with me.

[Note: This is part one of three which hopes to explain and elaborate Marx' & Bakunin's use of 'Dictatorship' —*in opposition to 'State'*—. If the reader wishes to anticipate writer, this one recommends the following: *Statism and Anarchy, Letter to Albert Richard: Letters to a Frenchman*, By Bakunin; *Conspectus on 'Statism and Anarchy'* by Marx; *His Life and Ideas: Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism, Letter to Luigi Fabri: On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, by Malatesta; and *Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* by Hal Draper]

Additional Commentary¹

“We Become Better Anarchists As We Practice Anarchy” given that Lower-Phase is supposed to be Anarchy.

“Every society which has abolished private property will be forced, we maintain, to organize itself on the lines of Communistic Anarchy. Anarchy leads to Communism, and Communism to Anarchy, both alike being expressions of the predominant tendency in modern societies, the pursuit of equality.”

– Pyotr Kropotkin, *“Conquest of Bread”* (1906)

“What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”

– Karl Marx, *“Critique of the Gotha Programme”* (1875)

“But if it is to be feasible, communism requires a huge moral improvement in the members of society, plus a highly developed and deep-seated sense of solidarity that the thrust of revolution may well not be enough to bring forth, especially if, in the early days, the material conditions that encourage its development [...] may not be in place.

*Such contradictions can be remedied through the immediate implementation of communism only in those areas and to the extent that circumstances allow, while collectivism is applied to the rest, but only on a **transitional** basis. [...] However, lest it then relapse into bourgeois-ism, it is going to have to make a rapid evolution in the direction of communism.”*

– Errico Malatesta, *“Program and Organisation of the International Working Men’s Association”* (1864)

This one place where Marx is extremely synergistic with Anarchists, due to his observation that to perform an act and to practice said act is to consciously develop a mastery or refinement over the act. Or,

“By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.” [Marx 1887, Capital Vol 1, The Labour Process or the Production of Use Values]

¹ <https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/188285471171/klezmer-un-anarkhizm-i-disagree-its-less>

But again, only because Lower-Phase –*which I’m equating to Collectivism*– is *already* a type of Anarchy, spreading and dismantling the State where it can.

[as an aside: Mutualism doesn’t count as “Lower-Phase Communism” when considering Marx’ program]

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Anarchblr
Annotation and Commentary on Marx's Gothakritik
With Additional Commentary
Oct.11, 2019 – Dec 19, 2020

<https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/632452347867578368/free-state-what-is-this-it-is-by-no-means-the> <https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/637897291955683328/do-you-think-its-possible-for-anarchists-and>
<https://www.tumblr.com/anarchblr/188285471171/klezmer-un-anarkhizm-i-disagree-its-less>
Slight editing

theanarchistlibrary.org