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Marxism or Anarchism?

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A talk given as part of a debate organised by the Trotskyist party "Alliance for Workers' Liberty." A basic introduction to why anarchism is better than Leninism.

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CNT rightly rejected, but unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist solution!³⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would have to say that the fundamental difference between anarchism and Marxism is that we have radically different visions of what socialism is and how to get there.

Anarchists reject the Leninist top-down vision of socialism. Our analysis of the authoritarian nature of Marxism is not hindsight. We correctly predicted the failures of Marxism long before it was implemented. As the Russian Revolution proved beyond doubt, in a conflict between workers' power and party power Leninists will suppress the former to ensure the latter.

Anarchism is revolution from a working class perspective. It places working class power and freedom at its core, both individual and collective. It aims for the destruction of hierarchical power. We take "Power to the people" seriously. The power exercised by social elites must be dissolved into the people otherwise "Power to the people" means nothing more than power to a few "leaders", and so class society continues (as Bolshevism proved).

We have a choice between anarchism, *real* "socialism from below," or Marxism. Between a society based on liberty, equality and solidarity or one rooted in inequalities of power.

So in answer to the question, "**Marxism or Anarchism?**" we argue the answer is Anarchism, if you want to change the world and not just the bosses!

³⁷ For a discussion on the differences between anarchist and Marxist visions of how the Spanish Revolution could have developed, see: Appendix 3.2 – 12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?

tion and concentrate on anarchist theory is ridiculous, yet that is what Marxists tend to do.³⁴

Moreover, it is easy to show that it was not anarchist theory which was to blame. Ignoring the example of the Makhnovists in the Russian Revolution, we can point to the Spanish revolution itself. Simply put, the Spanish Anarchists applied anarchist ideas in full in Aragon. There they created a federation of workers' associations as argued by anarchist thinkers from Bakunin onward. To contrast Catalonia and Aragon shows the weakness of the Marxist argument and, unsurprisingly, Aragon usually fails to get mentioned by Marxists.³⁵ The continuity of what happened in Aragon with the ideas of anarchism and the CNT's 1936 Zaragoza Resolution on Libertarian Communism is clear. Which shows how ridiculous the common Marxist claim that anarchist groups like the "**Friends of Durruti**" were forced to break with key aspects of anarchist theory and move toward revolutionary Marxism.³⁶

Before ending this subject, I must mention Trotsky's "alternative" for the Spanish Revolution. He talked about the "*revolutionary party ... seiz[ing] power.*" Which, of course, is hardly an example of "workers' power"! A few months later, he argued that "*because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.*" This was part of his argument that the "*revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party*" being "*an objective necessity.*" "*The revolutionary party (vanguard),*" he stressed, "*which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution.*" A position which the Catalan

³⁴ See I.8.10 Why did the C.N.T. collaborate with the state?

³⁵ See I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory, so showing anarchism is flawed?

³⁶ See Appendix 3.2 – 8. Did the Friends of Durruti "break with" anarchism?

(This is, more or less, the speech given at a debate organised by the Leninist Party "Alliance for Workers Liberty" in November, 2003. The debate was entitled "Marxism or Anarchism?" although it would have been better called "Leninism or Anarchism?" I've made a few clarification to the text at a few points in light of the subsequent contributions at the meeting, but the text is approximately 95% the same. I've also taken the liberty of adding footnotes so that interested readers can investigate the issues further. These reference "An Anarchist FAQ". Given how badly the AWL came across at the meeting I doubt I will be invited back any time soon!).

Introduction

Before starting, I would like to stress that I'm addressing mainstream Marxism here. In other words, Social Democracy and Leninism/Trotskyism. I am *not* talking about libertarian forms of Marxism which are close to Anarchism such as council communism or some forms of Autonomous Marxism. So, with that caveat, I will begin.

Marxism has failed. Where has it actually produced socialism? Nowhere. Rather it has created various one-party dictatorships presiding over state capitalist economies. Ironically, the "victories" of Marxism simply ended up providing empirical evidence for anarchist critiques of it. Social Democracy became reformist. The Bolshevik revolution quickly became the dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Just as we predicted.

In spite of this there are still Marxists around so I will discuss why Marxism was doomed to fail and indicate the anarchist alternative

Marxists versus Anarchism

Marxists tend to repeat certain straw men arguments about anarchism, so it is useful to clear the decks and go over them now.

Marxists like to assert (to quote Engels) that anarchists think of “*the state as the main evil to be abolished.*” This is utter nonsense. If you read anarchist theory you quickly discover that we are clearly opposed to capitalism as well as other forms of hierarchy. We see both the state and capitalism being abolished at the same time. To suggest otherwise is to distort our ideas.¹

Then there is the notion that anarchists reject collective class struggle. While this is totally false, Marxists usually say we do! In reality, you just have to read anarchist thinkers like Bakunin or Kropotkin, to see the truth.²

Another straw man is Lenin’s assertion that anarchists “*while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no idea of what the proletariat will put in its place.*” Such an assertion is simply incredible, given that revolutionary anarchists had been doing this since the 1860s! For example, Bakunin argued that “*since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere ... the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation.*” These councils would be composed of “*delegates ... invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.*” In other words, a system of workers’ councils to both fight capitalism **and** replace it. And what Lenin only started

¹ See H.2.4 Do anarchists think “*the state is the main enemy*”?

² See H.2.2 Do anarchists reject the need for collective working class struggle? (To be fair, the AWL speaker did not make this claim).

ing that it decisively showed that to overthrow the state meant replacing it with a revolutionary government. By failing to do the latter, the anarchists of the CNT and FAI betrayed the revolution and doomed it to defeat.³²

Anarchists, however, are not impressed. For all their talk of materialism, Marxists fail to mention the objective circumstances facing the CNT-FAI when they discuss the decisions of Spanish Anarchism. As such, the critique is pure idealism. Which is ironic, given Trotskyists on rise of Stalinism! Moreover, given that the CNT did not destroy the state, nor create a federation of workers’ councils, as anarchism argues, anarchists wonder how can anarchist theory be blamed? It seems ironic, to say the least, to complain about the failure of anarchism when anarchism was not applied!³³

To understand why the CNT acted as it did, we need to do what Marxists fail to do, provide some context. The decision to collaborate was obviously driven by fear of Franco and the concern not to divide the forces fighting him, plus isolation in Spain.. It was made on the 20th of July in Barcelona, the day after the army had been defeated and when the situation in the rest of the was unknown. As a 1937 CNT report put it, the CNT had a “*difficult alternative: to completely destroy the state, to declare war against the Rebels, the government, foreign capitalists ... or collaborating.*” The CNT militants, faced with this situation, made the wrong decision. However, to ignore this situa-

³² Strangely enough, the AWL speaker failed to mention Spain. On the Spanish revolution, see A.5.6 Anarchism and the Spanish Revolution ; I.8 Does revolutionary Spain show that libertarian socialism can work in practice?; for more on the Spanish Anarchist movement see Appendix 3.2 — Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

³³ See I.8.11 Was the decision to collaborate a product of anarchist theory, so showing anarchism is flawed?; Appendix 3.2 — 20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?

Anarchism

So Marxism does not work. What is the alternative? Unsurprisingly enough, it is anarchism!

Anarchists think that power should be in the hands of the masses themselves. We support direct action and self-management in workplace and community (*“the development and organisation of the social... power of the working classes,”* to use Bakunin’s words). Anarchists aim for people to control their own struggles and organisations. This requires decision making from the bottom-up, based on mass assemblies making the decisions. A federation of workers’ councils/communes would exist to co-ordinate decisions (based on elected, mandated and recallable delegates).³⁰

Such collective class struggle is the school of anarchism. People learn through struggle, and anarchists aim to aid that process. It prepares people to manage their personal and collective interests. It also creates libertarian social organisation which can resist the state and capital, win reforms and, ultimately, become the framework of a free society. As examples, anarchists point to the popular assemblies created in current revolt in Argentina or during the Great French Revolution and argue they would form the basis of a federation of revolutionary communes. In industry, we argue that strike assemblies would be the means of taking over production, forming the basis of socialisation of the economy and the abolition of the wages system by self-management.³¹

The Spanish Revolution

At this point, Marxists usually bring up the Spanish Revolution of 1936. For them it shows the failure of anarchism, argu-

³⁰ See Section J – What do anarchists do?

³¹ I.2.3 How is the framework of an anarchist society created?

to argue for in 1917, **five decades** after anarchists had come to that conclusion!³

And I must point out that anarchists do not think that the capitalist class will just “disappear” after a revolution. Thus we find Lenin quoted Marx suggesting that it was a case of the *“abolition of the state”* meaning the *“laying down of arms.”* As if. Do Marxists really think anarchists are really that stupid? In reality, Anarchist opposition to the “workers’ state” has absolutely **nothing** to do with defending a revolution. In fact, we argue for a federation of communes and a workers militia *“for common defence”* against the counter-revolution. To say otherwise is pure nonsense.⁴

In reality, anarchists do not think a revolution will create an perfect society “overnight” so to speak. Quite the reverse. We see revolution as a difficult process. There are no instant utopias. Kropotkin, for example, argued that a social revolution would *“shak[e] the foundations of industry”* and *“inevitably paralyse exchange and production.”* Every revolution, before and since, have confirmed the correctness of the anarchist position.⁵

Then there is the argument that anarchism is “anti-democratic.” This is derived from Engels equally inaccurate diatribe **“On Authority”** and like that full of straw man arguments (for example, Engels assertion that we reject “all authority!”).⁶

The “anarchism is ‘anti-democratic’” argument is most associated with Leninist Hal Draper. He argued that *“of all ideologies, anarchism is the most fundamentally anti-democratic in principle, since it is not only unalterably hostile to democ-*

³ See H.1.4 Do anarchists have “*absolutely no idea*” of what to put in place of the state?

⁴ See H.2.1 Do anarchists reject defending a revolution?

⁵ See H.2.5 Do anarchists think “full blown” socialism will be created overnight?”

⁶ See H.4 Didn’t Engels refute anarchism in “*On Authority*”?

racy in general but particularly to any socialist democracy of the most ideal kind that could be imagined.” Such an argument is, of course, just ridiculous. So anarchism is less democratic than fascism, monarchism, Stalinism? Is it **really** less democratic than Trotsky and his “dictatorship of the party”? Of course not, yet Marxists repeat Draper’s comment with a straight face!

The certain flaw in Draper’s argument is the obvious fact that the majority can be wrong and minorities have the right and duty to rebel. To take a pertinent example, in 1914 the leaders of the Social Democratic Party in the German Parliament voted for war credits. The anti-war minority went along with the majority. Would Draper argue that they were right to do so? They **were** subject to the “most perfect socialist democracy” after all. Or take the recent wildcat strikes by Postal Workers. Would Marxists oppose them as they were initially the work of a minority and the majority of union members had rejected strike action in a ballot? I doubt it!⁷

Draper argues for “**democratic control from below**” instead of anarchism. Of course, anarchists like Bakunin had argued for elected, mandated and recallable delegates long before the Paris Commune but let us forget that little fact. So what does Draper’s scheme actually involve? Marxism, as Lenin made clear, does not aim for **direct** working class power, but power to the party, which we have to obey (or else!). As Trotsky put it, “a revolution is ‘made’ directly by a minority. The success of a revolution is possible, however, only where this minority finds more or less support, or at least friendly neutrality, on the part of the majority.” So Draper’s “**democratic control from below**” simply results in power being centralised into fewer and fewer hands. The “dictatorship of the proletariat”

Russian workers, although reduced in number, were still more than capable of taking collective action throughout the civil war period. As this action was against the Bolsheviks, it has been written out of history in Marxist accounts of the revolution. Indeed, strikes against the Bolsheviks took place from the start, as did repression by the Bolshevik state. Before, during and after the civil war Russian workers took collective action in defence of their interests and, moreover, faced martial law, lockouts, mass arrests of strikers and the imprisonment and shooting of “ringleaders.” This happened all through the Civil War, which hardly makes sense. After all, if the working class had “disappeared,” this would not be required! As such, the Kronstadt revolt cannot be considered as an isolated occurrence. Lastly, I must stress that this argument was first developed by Lenin in response to rising working class protest rather than its lack.²⁸

Faced with all this, perhaps a Marxist will reply that Bolshevik authoritarianism was still a necessity. Anarchists refute such assertions by pointing to the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine. This movement successfully fought the Whites without creating or theoretically justifying party dictatorship. They successfully implemented soviet democracy and working class freedom of speech, organisation and assembly, advocated workers’ self-management of production and the army implemented the election of officers. In summary, the Makhnovists prove that the failure of Bolshevism cannot be blamed solely on objective factors and that Bolshevik ideology played its role. They show the importance of politics and structures aimed for in a revolution.²⁹

²⁸ See H.6.3 Were the Russian workers “declassed” and “atomised”?; Appendix 4.3 – 5 Was the Russian working class atomised or “declassed”?; On Kronstadt see at: Appendix 4.2 – What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?

²⁹ See Appendix 4.6 Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?

⁷ See H.2.11 Are anarchists “anti-democratic”?

The most common excuse is the civil war against the Whites. However, undemocratic activities started before it got going so that is factually wrong. Then there is the fact that, according to Lenin, civil war was an “inevitable” result of revolution. It is hardly convincing to argue that everything would have been fine if the inevitable had not happened, yet this is what the Marxist argument boils down to!²⁴

Then there is the argument that “exceptional circumstances” meant that the Bolsheviks could not be as democratic as they would like. But, yet again, Lenin again thought that every revolution would face difficult circumstances. He even admitted that revolution in the west would see greater destruction and chaos!²⁵ So arguing that everything would have been fine if the inevitable had not happened is hardly convincing. Moreover, given that Trotsky slagged off the anarchists in Spain for blaming “*exceptional circumstances*” for their actions, it would be ironic (to say the least) for Trotskyists to excuse the Bolsheviks in these terms!²⁶ Lastly, anarchists find this excuse particularly unconvincing as the idea that a revolution would face economic desription was predicted by anarchists like Kropotkin.²⁷

Then there is the argument that the Russian working class “disappeared” or became “declassed,” necessitating Bolshevik party dictatorship. The problem with this argument is that the

²⁴ See H.6.1 Can objective factors explain the failure of the Russian Revolution?; Appendix 4.3 What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?; Appendix 3.3 – 15. What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?. Some Marxists argue that civil war existed from the start, from November 1917. They fail to see that this does them no favours, as they are implicitly admitting that revolution and working class democracy are incompatible.

²⁵ See H.6 Why did the Russian Revolution fail?; Appendix 4.3 – 4 Did economic collapse and isolation destroy the revolution?

²⁶ See H.6 Why did the Russian Revolution fail?; Append 4.3 – 2 Can “objective factors” really explain the failure of Bolshevism?

²⁷ See H.6.1 Can objective factors explain the failure of the Russian Revolution?; Appendix 4.3 – 1 Do anarchists ignore the objective factors facing the Russian revolution?

becomes, in fact, the “dictatorship **over** the proletariat” by the party.⁸

And it would be churlish to note that, once in power, Marxists themselves have habitually rejected democracy when it suited them **and** justified it in ideological terms. So, remember when Lenin or Trotsky argue for the dictatorship of the party, the over-riding of the democratic decisions (“*wavering*”) of the masses by the party, the elimination of soldiers and workers committees by appointees armed with “dictatorial” power or when the Bolshevik gerrymander soviets and disbanded any elected with non-Bolshevik majorities, it is anarchism which is fundamentally “anti-democratic”!⁹

Real Differences between Anarchism and Marxism

So those where a few of the most common Marxist fallacies about Anarchism. This brings us to the big question, namely what are, from an anarchist perspective, the real differences between Anarchism and Marxism.

Firstly, there is centralisation. Anarchists argue that this hinders participation of the many, marginalising the population. It places power into a few hands and, at best, we end up picking our masters rather than governing ourselves. It is top down and bureaucratic by its very nature as well as being rooted in the inequality of power — those at the top have more power than those at the bottom. And I must stress that this opposition to centralisation does not mean opposition to co-ordination, a subject I will return to.¹⁰

⁸ See H.1.2 What are the key differences between Anarchists and Marxists?

⁹ See H.6 Why did the Russian Revolution fail?

¹⁰ See B.2 Why are anarchists against the state?; Appendix 3.4 – 4. How is the SWP wrong about centralisation?; Appendix 3.4 – 15. Why is

Related to this is the question of the so-called “workers’ state.” Marxists are for it, anarchists are against it. As noted earlier, our opposition to the “worker’s state” has nothing to do with having to defend a revolution. Rather, it derives from anarchists and Marxists having two different definitions of the state. For the Anarchist, the state is the concentration of power into a few hands. This, we argue, is because it is designed for, and required to, ensure minority class rule. In contrast, the Marxist definition of the state is that it is an “instrument of class rule.” We argue that this is, unlike the anarchist one, a metaphysical definition and utter ignores the key issue, namely who has power. Moreover, it opens the door for the nonsense used to justify Bolshevik dictatorship during the Russian revolution.¹¹

So our opposition to the “workers’ state” is really about who has power: is it the working class or the party? For Marxists, it is the latter. As Trotsky argued in 1939 (18 years after he made similar arguments when he was in power) “*The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves ... if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself.*” So much for “workers’ power”! And, as everyone is, by definition, is “backward” compared to the vanguard, we

the SWP’s support for centralisation anti-socialist?; I.5.2 Why are confederations of participatory communities needed?

¹¹ H.3.7 What is wrong with the Marxist theory of the state?; H.1.3 Why do anarchists wish to abolish the state “overnight”?; H.2.1 Do anarchists reject defending a revolution?

and Revolution” the Bolsheviks had not only created such a regime, they were arguing that this was what the “dictatorship of the proletariat” meant! For example, Zinoviev proclaimed at the Second Congress of the Communist International that “*the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party.*” Lenin and Trotsky did not disagree, with both supporting this position to their deaths.²²

In summary, there is a clear-cut link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practice of Stalinism. This was not a coincidence. Rather it was a fatal combination of bad politics and institutional pressures. The Bolshevik vision of workers’ power destroyed **real** working class power in society and in the soviets. Its vision of “socialism” destroyed **real** socialism at point of production.²³

Excuses

Of course most Marxists are aware that something went wrong in the Russian Revolution, although they disagree about exactly when. Trotskyists have a few standard explanations of why Bolshevism became the dictatorship of the party and why Stalinism appeared.

²² See H.3.8 What is wrong with the Leninist theory of the state?; H.1.2 What are the key differences between Anarchists and Marxists?

²³ I’m not suggesting that Marxists seek to become a new ruling class. Far from it. Most members of Marxist parties are honestly in favour of democracy and socialism. I’m arguing that creating certain forms of institution will produce specific social relationships which will shape the people within them and the political ideas they hold and vice versa. The state is designed for minority power and will reproduce it. Centralisation of power will result in top-down, bureaucratic practices. State capitalist institutions and social relations will never produce socialism. I would also suggest that most Marxists have little real knowledge of their own movement’s history and what their leaders did once in power. Being ignorant of history, they will be doomed to repeat it — particularly if they reproduce similar centralised, top-down structures as the Bolsheviks did and consider, like them, that they represent “workers’ power.”

factories to the state bureaucracy. Lenin argued for and implemented one-man management, piecework, Taylorism and other things Stalinism is condemned for. In the army, Trotsky disbanded the soldier committees and elected officers by decree.²¹

How Trotsky defended the appointment of officers is significant. He argued that as the government was elected by the workers, the workers had nothing to fear from its imposing appointees! He compared to the TU leadership — you elected the committee, and can replace it. The committee is “*better able to judge in the matter*” of appointing people “*than you*”! He went on to ponder “*how could the soldiers who have just entered the army choose the chiefs! Have they have any vote to go by? They have none. And therefore elections are impossible.*” If only the Tsar had thought of that one!

I know what the Marxists here will be thinking. Typical anarchist, not mentioning the civil war! Where are the Whites? Where are the 14 (or however many!) imperialist armies of intervention? Why has he not spoken of the civil war? There is a good reason why I have not mentioned the civil war: it had not started yet! As these authoritarian actions by the Bolsheviks occurred before the civil war broke out and so it cannot be used to excuse the Bolsheviks. Indeed, it could be argued that the civil war saved the Bolsheviks, as they could argue that the only alternative to their dictatorship was a White one. In summary, though, the civil war did not create, but simply **increased** the authoritarian tendencies of the Bolsheviks.

Anarchists predicted that the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” would simply become the dictatorship of a few party leaders. When we argue this, Marxists usually call his slanderers. Ironically enough, within a year of Lenin publishing “**State**

²¹ H.6 Why did the Russian Revolution fail?; Appendix 3.2 — 11. Why is Morrow’s comments against the militarisation of the Militias ironic?; Appendix 3.2 — 17. Why is Morrow’s support for “*proletarian methods of production*” ironic?;

have the theoretical justification for the party dictatorship. A conclusion Trotsky was not shy in embracing.¹²

Then there is the question of “**socialism from above.**” Following Hal Draper, Marxists like to assert they are against this and in favour of “socialism from below.” However, anarchists reject such claims.¹³ Most obviously, we argue that the centralism Marxists support necessitates decision making and so rule “from above.” Then there is the fact Marxism is rooted in “from above.” As Lenin stressed, “*the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy*” was “*to proceed from the top downward.*” Ironically, he stressed that “*limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism.*” This was no temporary aberration. He infamously repeated this argument in 1920, in his defence of party power “Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder.” Significantly, Lenin ignored the role of the proletariat in the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” However, he did stress the role of the 19 members of the Central Committee.¹⁴

So in these days of protests against the G8, we find the key the difference between Leninism and capitalism. Under capitalism, 8 people make decisions for millions. Under Bolshevism, 19 people make them.

Then there is the question of “vanguardism,” of the role and organisation of the “revolutionary” party. It must be stressed that anarchists do not reject the idea of revolutionaries organising together to influence the class struggle. Far from it.¹⁵ We

¹² See H.3.8 What is wrong with the Leninist theory of the state?; On Trotsky see Appendix 3.1 –15. Did Trotsky keep alive Leninism’s “democratic essence”?

¹³ In fact, it is anarchists who first used the imaginary “from below.”: H.3.2 Is Marxism “*socialism from below*”?; Appendix 3.1 — 14. Why is McNally’s use of the term “*socialism from below*” dishonest?

¹⁴ See H.3.3 Is Leninism “*socialism from below*”?

¹⁵ See J.3 What forms of organisation do anarchists build?

do, however, reject the Leninist way of organising and influencing implied in the term “vanguardism.”

For anarchists, this is the “revolutionary” party organised in a capitalist manner: centralised, top-down, hierarchical. It recreates the very society it says its against and, if given the chance, will simply rebuild the “new” society in its own image. It is based on the premise that workers can only achieve trade union consciousness which lays the ground for party dictatorship as opposition to the party line can be dismissed as “petty-bourgeois”! As it was, once the party was in power.¹⁶

Moreover, it does not work that well. In 1917, Lenin had to fight his own party machine. It was only by ignoring its own rules that it was effective! Even more ironically, by applying its own rules post-1917, it helped to undermine the revolution.¹⁷

Lastly, there is the different visions of what socialism is. In 1917, Lenin openly argued for state capitalism. He considered “socialism” as being state capitalism made to serve all the people. For Lenin, “socialism” was not built on working class organisation but rather built on the structures created by the capitalist class and the capitalist state. Rather than see workers’ self-management as the key issue in socialism, he considered nationalisation as key to determining if Russia was “socialist.” Which, as he noted in “State and Revolution”, was essentially universal wage slavery to the state! Unsurprisingly, given this, support for “workers’ control” was quickly abandoned in favour of one-man management. A development, incidentally, which was never considered as a mistake or a retreat!¹⁸

¹⁶ See H.5 What is vanguardism and why do anarchists reject it?

¹⁷ See H.5.12 Surely the Russian Revolution proves that vanguard parties work?

¹⁸ See H.3.12 Is big business the precondition for socialism?; H.3.14 Don’t Marxists believe in workers’ control?

Ultimately, the real differences between anarchism and Marxism is that we have totally different ideas of what socialism would look like and how to get there.¹⁹

The Russian Revolution

Which brings me to the Russian revolution. Indeed, if it was not for this revolution we would not be having this meeting. Social Democracy showed it was bankrupt in 1914 and without the apparent success of the Bolsheviks, Marxism would have been written off as flawed. The hope of the Russian Revolution saved Marxism and still inspires many today. Anarchists, unsurprisingly, do not see this event in quite the same light as Marxists. For us, it clearly shows the failure of Marxism. It simply brought the flaws in Marxism into the foreground.

When asked what they want, Marxists almost always point you in the direction of Lenin’s “*State and Revolution.*” This seems ironic, given that it did not last the night once the Bolsheviks seized state power! So asking us to read it and support Marxism is a bit like Tony Blair saying we should vote for him in the next general election as the invasion of Iraq was not in the Labour Party manifesto!²⁰

The Bolshevik Revolution started to degenerate from the start. Once power was seized by the Bolshevik Party, they turned authoritarian to maintain their position. Their secret police (the Cheka) was used to attack anarchists across the country. The Bolsheviks gerrymandered soviets and disbanded any they lost elections to. They undermined the factory committees, stopping them federating and basically handed the

¹⁹ See H.3.1 Do Anarchists and Marxists want the same thing?; Appendix 3.1 – 13. If Marxism is “*socialism from below,*” why do anarchists reject it?

²⁰ See H.1.7 Haven’t you read Lenin’s “State and Revolution”?; Appendix 3.3 – 12. Would the “workers’ state” really be different, as Mitchinson claims?