

# **The SWP versus Anarchism**

Anarcho

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These are two letters and part of a leaflet related to an article in the SWP's *Socialist Review* by Pat Stack on anarchism. This article (imaginatively entitled "*Anarchy in the UK?*") was an attempt to rubbish anarchism in the eyes of the "anti-globalisation" movement at the time (around 2000). It had to be the worse article on anarchism I had seen (and there is stiff competition for that honour, usually from the SWP!).

The first letter was published in an edited form. That produced a reply from an SWP and I sent in the second letter, which was not published (no reason was given). I also used Pat Stack's article in a leaflet handed out at one of the SWP's *Marxism* events. In it I contrasted what Stack proclaimed about Bakunin and Kropotkin with what they actually advocated.

My account of attending Stack's *Marxism* meeting on anarchism can be found here. Here is a humorous (I hope!) sketch inspired by a comment said at one of the meetings (yes, a SWPer DID proclaim that "we are all individuals"): The Dead Dogma Sketch.

## First letter to Socialist Review Magazine

*(published in edited form)*

Dear *Socialist Review*

It is difficult to know where to start in Pat Stack's "*Anarchy in the UK?*" article (issue no. 246). It contains so many inaccuracies that I can only assume that Stack either knows nothing about anarchism or is deliberately lying. I know that the SWP wish to combat anarchist influence in the anti-globalisation movement but this article will surely backfire on you. This is because anyone with even a small understanding of anarchist theory and history will instantly know that Stack's "analysis" of anarchism is so flawed as to be laughable.

Needless to say, I cannot reply to every mistake in the article. I will, however, concentrate on a few of the more glaring ones in order to give your readers a taste of the level of inaccuracy it contains.

The most amazing assertion is that anarchists like Kropotkin and Bakunin did not see "class conflict" as "the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means." Obviously the author has never read any of Bakunin's and Kropotkin's work. Indeed, Kropotkin's **The Great French Revolution** was written explicitly to show "*the part played by the people of the country and town in the [French] Revolution.*" He did not deny the importance of collective class struggle, rather he stressed it. As he wrote, "*to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this.*" Kropotkin could not be clearer on this subject.

He always stressed that "*the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, the State.*" Such struggle, "*better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State.*"

Similarly, Bakunin argued "*the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association.*" He thought that the **International Workers Association** should become "*an*

*earnest organisation of workers associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie.*” In other words, the “*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association of workers, first in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*”

He stresses this vision in his last work **Statism and Anarchy**: “*the Slavic proletariat ... must enter the International [Workers’ Association] en masse, form[ing] factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations*” as “*a social revolution ... is by nature an international revolution.*” Which, I must note, makes a mockery of Stack’s claim Bakunin did not see “skilled artisans and organised factory workers” as “the source of the destruction of capitalism” and “agents for change.”

Bakunin, like Kropotkin, saw a socialist society as being based on “*the collective ownership of producers’ associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes.*” Thus “*the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations.*” The link between present and future would be labour unions (workers’ associations). These played the key role in Bakunin’s politics both as the means to abolish capitalism and the state and as the framework of a socialist society (this support for workers’ councils predates Marxist support by five decades, I must note).

Bakunin, like Kropotkin, thought the strike was “*the beginnings of the social war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie... Strikes are a valuable instrument from two points of view. Firstly, they electrify the masses ... awaken in them the feeling of the deep antagonism which exists between their interests and those of the bourgeoisie... secondly they help immensely to provoke and establish between the workers of all trades, localities and countries the consciousness and very fact of solidarity: a twofold action, both negative and positive, which tends to constitute directly the new world of the proletariat, opposing it almost in an absolute way to the bourgeois world.*” This would accumulate in “*a general strike*” which could “*only lead to a cataclysm which would make society start a new life after shedding its old skin.*” This would be combined with “*an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.*”

Indeed, you do not have to read Bakunin to find this out, you can read Marx and Engels. As Marx noted, Bakunin thought that the “*working class ... must only organise themselves by trades-unions.*” Engels acknowledged that the anarchists aimed to “*dispose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.*”

As can be seen, the claim Kropotkin or Bakunin, or anarchists in general, ignored the class struggle and collective working class struggle is either a lie or indicates ignorance.

All this indicates that Stack’s claim that “the huge advantage” anarcho-syndicalists have “over other anarchists was their understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the workplace) and the need for collective action” is simply nonsense. Bakunin and Kropotkin, as can be seen, also understood all this. Little wonder that all serious historians see the obvious similarities between syndicalism and Bakunin’s anarchism. As Kropotkin put it: “*Syndicalism is nothing other than the rebirth of the International — federalist, worker, Latin.*” Stack shows his ignorance yet again.

Kropotkin’s comments on the state as the “protector” of capitalism, I must note, indicates the false nature of Stack’s claim that “the idea that dominates anarchist thought” is that “the state is the main enemy, rather than identifying the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed.” Anarchists, as Kropotkin indicates, are well aware that the state exists to defend

capitalism. As he wrote elsewhere, the “*State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must reply on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs.*”

Similarly with Bakunin, who argued that the state “*is authority, domination, and forced, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses.*” He saw the social revolution as destroying capitalism and the state at the same time, that is “*to overturn the State’s domination, and that of the privileged classes whom it solely represents.*” Thus the state and capitalism must be destroyed at the same time. In the words of Bakunin, “*no revolution could succeed ... today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution*”

To state otherwise is to misrepresent anarchist theory.

The difference between anarchists and Marxists on the issue of the state is the recognition that the state bureaucracy has interests of its own due to its hierarchical nature. This means that any state-like organisation will develop a bureaucracy with interests separate and opposed to the people it claims to represent. As Kropotkin argued, Anarchists “*maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.*” The so-called “workers’ state” is not exception to this as it is based on the same principles of delegation of power into the hands of the few every state is based on.

Stack’s discussion of Kropotkin’s idea of Mutual Aid is simply false. Stack’s examples of “mutual aid” were, in fact, examples used by Kropotkin to show that people could organise themselves and social life without the government and without capitalist economic values. He used these as evidence that libertarian communism was not utopian but rather expressed the logical outcome of certain tendencies in social life towards anarchy and communism (see his **Anarchist Communism** for details).

As far as mutual aid goes, Kropotkin simply argues that it was “a factor of evolution.” He wrote the book **Mutual Aid** to refute capitalist claims that competition was natural and only key to change. Kropotkin saw mutual aid (i.e. solidarity or co-operation) as an evolutionary response to difficulties faced by animals and humans to survive in a hostile world. Unsurprisingly, when he talks about mutual aid in modern society he discusses labour unions and strikes. He stresses that unionism was an “*expression*” of “*the workers’ need of mutual support.*” In other words, the realities of capitalism, of exploitation and oppression by the boss and by the state, forced workers to practice mutual aid (i.e. solidarity) and take collective action (strikes) to survive. Mutual aid (or co-operation), in other words, was the outcome of class conflict in Kropotkin’s eyes and definitely not its replacement as a means of social change. As he wrote elsewhere, “*the strike develops the sentiment of solidarity.*”

As for anarcho-syndicalists rejecting “political action,” well this is not true. They reject bourgeois political action — the standing of socialists in elections. As Rudolf Rocker noted in his classic work **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, “*the point of attack in the political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people*” and so anarcho-syndicalists, like other anarchists, think that it “*must take the form of direct action*”, using “*instruments of economic power.*” Why do anarchists reject electioneering? To quote Bakunin, the “*worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men*

*are made by them.*” The history of Marxist Social Democracy and the German Greens confirmed this analysis.

Moreover, Marxist support for electioneering is somewhat at odds with their claims of being in favour of collective, mass action. There is nothing more isolated, atomised and individualistic than voting. It is the act of one person in a closet by themselves. It is the total opposite of collective struggle. The individual is alone before, during and after the act of voting. Indeed, unlike direct action, which, by its very nature, throws up new forms of organisation in order to manage and co-ordinate the struggle, voting creates no alternative organs of working class self-management. Nor can it. Neither is it based on nor does it create collective action or organisation. It simply empowers an individual (the elected representative) to act on behalf of a collection of other individuals (the voters). Such delegation will hinder collective organisation and action as the voters expect their representative to act and fight for them — if they did not, they would not vote for them in the first place!

Given that Marxists usually slander anarchists as “individualists” the irony is delicious!

Stack revives the old Marxist myth that anarchism “yearns for what has gone.” This is not true. Anarchists have always based their ideas on current developments and have always looked forward, not backwards, as would be obvious from even a quick reading of Proudhon, Bakunin or Kropotkin. Proudhon, for example, argued for “*the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers’ associations ... We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic.*” He stressed that workers’ associations would manage production and while under capitalism “*large industry ... come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the association.*”

The author claims that Bakunin “industrialisation was an evil.” Actually Bakunin argued that “*to destroy... all the instruments of labour [i.e. technology]... would be to condemn all humanity — which is infinity too numerous today to exist... on the simple gifts of nature... — to... death by starvation ... Only when workers “obtain not individual but **collective** property in capital” and capital is no longer “concentrated in the hands of a separate, exploiting class” will they be able “to smash the tyranny of capital.*” Indeed, as noted above, Bakunin considered one of the first acts of the revolution would be workers’ associations taking over the means of production and turning them into collective property managed by the workers themselves. Hence Daniel Guerin’s comment:

*“Proudhon and Bakunin were ‘collectivists,’ which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property*

With a similar disregard of facts (and logic) Stack asserts that Kropotkin’s “ideal society would be based on small autonomous communities, devoted to small scale production. He had witnessed such communities among Siberian peasants and watchmakers in the Swiss mountains.” Firstly, if Kropotkin actually saw these communities then how could they be “what has gone”? Secondly, Kropotkin based his classic work **Field, Factories and Workshops** on detailed analysis of current developments in the economy and came to the conclusion that industry would spread across

the global (which has happened) and that small industries will continue to exist side by side with large ones (which also has been confirmed). From these facts he argued that a socialist society would aim to decentralise production, combining agriculture with industry and both using modern technology to the fullest. As Kropotkin argued, the “scattering of industries over the country — so as to bring the factory amidst the fields ... agriculture ... combined with industry ... to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work — is surely the next step to be made, as soon as a reorganisation of our present conditions is possible.” He did not argue for “small-scale production” (he still saw the need for factories, for example) but rather the transformation of capitalism into a society human beings could live full and meaningful lives in.

Thirdly, the obvious implication of Stack’s comments is that the SWP think that a socialist society will basically be the same as capitalism, using the technology, industrial structure and industry developed under class society without change. After all, did Lenin not argue that “*Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people*”? Needless to say, capitalist industry has not developed neutrally. Rather it has been distorted by the twin requirements to maintain capitalist profits and power. As Kropotkin stressed, the concentration of capital Marxists base their arguments for socialism on simply is “*an amalgamation of capitalists for the purpose of dominating the market, not for cheapening the technical process.*”

The first task of the revolution will be to transform the industrial structure, not keep it as it is. Anarchists have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute. Kropotkin’s vision of a decentralised, federated communal society was one in which “*the workers*” were “*the real managers of industries.*”

The *real* differences between anarchism and Marxism can be seen from the discussion on Kronstadt. In spite of Stack’s assertion, the “central demand” of the uprising was, essentially, “*all power to the soviets*” (as Paul Avrich noted, “*Soviets without Communists’ was not, as is often maintained by both Soviet and non-Soviet writers, a Kronstadt slogan.*”). They rejected the idea that soviet power equalled party power.

Thus the Kronstadt revolt was an attempt to re-introduce the soviet democracy and power abolished by the Bolsheviks before the start of the Russian Civil War. The Bolshevik suppression of Kronstadt was the end point of a series of actions by the Bolsheviks which began with them abolishing soviets which elected non-Bolshevik majorities, elected officers and soldiers soviets in the Red Army and replacing workers’ self-management of production by state-appointed managers with “dictatorial” powers. While the Kronstadt revolt is an important event in showing the anti-working class nature of Bolshevism it is not the only one. The activities of the Bolsheviks before the start of the Russian Civil War indicates well Kropotkin’s argument that “revolutionary government” is a contradiction in terms.

Therefore, it seems somewhat strange to here Stack blame all the repressive acts of the Bolsheviks on the Civil War. After all, they started before it. Moreover, Lenin had argued in 1917 that “*revolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war.* If Bolshevism cannot survive the inevitable then it is hardly a model to follow.

Stack argues that the Russian working class had been “decimated” by 1921. While there is no denying that the urban working class had been greatly reduced in number, it cannot be said to have disappeared. Nor had its ability for collective action (and so collective decision making) been destroyed. After all, the Kronstadt uprising was provoked by a wave of strikes, protest meetings and demonstrations (and Bolshevik repression of them) in Petrograd. Similar events occurred in Moscow. As Bakunin argued, strikes showed “*indicate a certain collective strength*” and, after all, it was a similar spontaneous wave of protest which had created the soviets and factory committees in 1917.

This indicates that Stack’s argument is flawed. Rather than objective factors eliminating soviet democracy, we can point to Bolshevik politics and actions as contributing to its destruction. After all, the Russian workers were strong enough to strike, to take collective action, in the face of terrible objective conditions. Why could they not collectively manage society in their soviets? Perhaps because the Bolsheviks would not let them as the workers would not have voted for the “workers” party?

Similarly, Stack argues that the Bolsheviks could not allow workers to vote freely after the end of the Civil War as this would inevitably result in White victory, a victory Stack argues the working class “would have paid a huge price.” Yes, by repressing Kronstadt Lenin and Trotsky saved the revolution — saved it for Stalin. The ramifications of suppressing Kronstadt and the arguments used to justify the “revolutionary” Bolshevik dictatorship paved the way for Stalinism, but the SWP appear incapable of seeing this.

Ultimately, Stack’s comments show that the SWP’s commitment to workers’ power and democracy is non-existent. If the party leaders decide a decision by the masses is incorrect, then the masses are overridden (and repressed). What is there left of workers’ self-emancipation, power or democracy when “the workers state” turns on the workers for trying to practice these essential features of any real form of socialism? As Trotsky put it in 1921: *As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy!*” He continued by stating the “*Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers’ democracy.*”

In this he followed Lenin. While the SWP like to say they are for “socialism from below,” Lenin argued in 1905 that “*the principle, ‘only from below’ is an **anarchist** principle.*” For Lenin, Marxists must be in favour of “*From above as well as from below*” and “*renunciation of pressure also from above is **anarchism***” According to Lenin, “*pressure from below is pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government. Pressure from above is pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens.*” Needless to say, having the weapons and armed forces makes the “pressure” of the “revolutionary” government much stronger than the pressure of the citizens (as the Russian workers discovered). In 1920, he was arguing that “*revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.*” Who is such an element? Anyone who does not do what the party decrees.

It is the experience of Bolshevism in power that best refutes the Marxist claim that the workers’ state “will be democratic and participatory. Once workers have taken power they will set about the task of creating a new world free from exploitation and class struggle.” Rather than the workers’ taking power in Russian, it was the Bolshevik party which took power (as Trotsky noted, “*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard.*”) Rather than the working class as a whole “*seizing power*”, it is the “*vanguard*” which takes power — “*a revolutionary party,*



*even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" (Trotsky) Which is, of course, true. They are still organs of working class self-management (such as factory committees, workers councils, trade unions, soldier committees) through which working people can still exercise their sovereignty. Let us not forget that it was precisely these organs which the Bolsheviks came into conflict with and abolished or undermined in favour of party/state power.

Anarchists are well aware of the fact that there is an "uneven consciousness" within the working class. That is why we organise into groups and federations to influence the class struggle as equals within working class organisations. However, the Leninist solution to this problem (party power) creates minority rule as the party uses its so-called advanced ideas to repress workers who refuse to accept them. A revolution will solve social problems in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a "revolutionary" party or government. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the "*revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people.*" Bolshevism in theory and in practice justifies the repression of workers in their "objective" interests (as determined by the party). Little wonder the Bolshevik tradition is being rejected by a new generation of activists.

As I noted above, there is so much more I could write but space excludes it. For example, I could have discussed Proudhon's ideas more fully and shown that he, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, saw the central role of the working class in changing society and how his ideas were not solely for the artisan or peasant. Similarly, I could discuss how anarchists organise to win people to our ideas in more depth. Equally, I could indicate why the events of the Spanish Revolution indicate a failure of anarchists rather than a failure of anarchism. If your readers are interested in finding out what anarchism *really* stands for as well as an anarchist discussion on the Spanish Revolution I would suggest they visit this webpage: [www.anarchistfaq.org](http://www.anarchistfaq.org)

yours in disgust

Iain McKay

## Second letter to Socialist Review Magazine

*(submitted but unpublished)*

Dear *Socialist Review*

I must admit to being bemused by Howard Miles reply to my letter (**Socialist Review** no. 249). He states that the "*nub of the issue in this debate seems to consist of disagreement over two fundamental notions,*" namely that "*democratic centralist revolutionary party is necessary for a successful socialist revolution*" and, secondly, "*the necessity of a workers' state arising from a socialist revolution.*" Nothing could be further from the truth. While these **are** two fundamental disagreements between anarchism and Marxism, they had absolutely nothing to do with my letter, which indicated how Pat Stack had misrepresented anarchist thought in his article. That Mr. Miles fails to acknowledge this is sad, if not unsurprising. It seems that Stack is not the only SWP member who considers accuracy as an irrelevance when discussing other points of view.

I am happy to discuss Miles arguments, in spite of their irrelevance to the content of my letter. He asks "*do anarchists imagine that the capitalist class internationally will just give up and go*

away” after a revolution? The “*threat of counter-revolution*,” he argues, necessitates “*both local and national structures, under the control of the mass of the working class*.” Anarchists are well aware of this. To quote Bakunin:

*“the federative alliance of all working men’s associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first **reorganising** on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation...”*

As can be seen, we are clear on this issue (and the others he wonders about). Not that Miles did not know this already, as this quote is contained in the same article as the “*fighting fire with fire*” analogy he uses ([www.infoshop.org/texts/swp.html](http://www.infoshop.org/texts/swp.html)). Perhaps his use of this analogy is pure co-incidence, but I doubt it.

Now I turn to his argument that the “*political unevenness that exists within the working class*” makes federalism impractical. Miles talks about “*enabling the class to seize power*.” Is this the actual aim of Leninism? Let us quote Trotsky: “*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard*.” Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the “*vanguard*” which takes power — “*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society*.” Which is, of course, true — they are still organs of working class self-management (such as factory committees, workers councils, trade unions, soldier committees) through which working people can still exercise their sovereignty. Such working class organs **do** conflict with the sovereign rule of the party and so have to be undermined. Little wonder the Bolsheviks disbanded soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities, decreed the end of soldier democracy in the Red Army and urged “*dictatorial*” one-man management instead of workers’ self-management.

Why does the “*revolutionary party*” have to be the “*sovereign ruler of society*” rather than the working class as a whole? Simply because of the latter’s “*political unevenness*.” As Trotsky argued:

*“The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the ‘dictatorship’ of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.”*

In this he was just repeating the Platform of the Left Opposition and its “*Leninist principle*” (“*inviolable for every Bolshevik*”) that “*the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party*.”

Such a position necessitates centralism, of course, but it is a denial of workers’ power and any claim that the working class seizes power in the so-called “workers’ state.” Centralism was

designed for minority rule and to “exclude the mass of people from taking part in decision-making processes in society” in class society (again Miles is paraphrasing my article), so it comes as no surprise that Bolshevism argues for it.

Miles states that “failure to use the only form of revolutionary organisation that has worked in the past” will “inevitably condemn future revolutions to failure.” Strange. Did the Russian Revolution actually result in soviet democracy? Far from it. The Kronstadt revolt was repressed because it demanded soviet power. Nor was this an isolated example. The Bolsheviks had been disbanding soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities since early 1918 (i.e. **before** the start of the Civil War).

It will, of course, be argued that the Civil War caused the degeneration of the revolution. Let us ignore that this had begun before it started (as well as Trotsky’s arguments) and instead assume that the Civil War was the cause of party dictatorship. Lenin argued in 1917 that “not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war.” If Civil War is inevitable and Bolshevism cannot survive it without degenerating then, clearly, Bolshevism **failed** in the Russian Revolution. Bolshevism, with its centralism, party power and statism did not work in the past, as Russia proved.

The **real** “nub” of the issue is whether you confuse workers’ power with party power. Leninism clearly does. Anarchism does not. We do not deny that there is political unevenness within the working class. Indeed, that is why we support federalism (and the need for specific anarchist organisations to influence the class struggle). Only by encouraging the active participation of working class people in their own organisations, struggles and revolution can the political development of the working classes be ensured. By discussing and debating the needs of the class struggle and revolution, by organising from the bottom up and using federated workers’ councils to co-ordinate struggle, the political awareness of the majority will be increased. By centralising power in a state, this process is aborted as the working class is divested of its power to manage its own revolution and its organisations just become fig leaves for party power.

That is why anarchists follow Bakunin when he argued for “the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards” as the basis of a real working class revolution. If you are interested in **real** “socialism from below” discover anarchism (“the principle, ‘only from below’ is an **anarchist principle**” — Lenin). I would again suggest you visit [www.anarchistfaq.org.uk](http://www.anarchistfaq.org.uk) for details and a further discussion of these issues.

yours sincerely  
Iain McKay

## The SWP versus Anarchism

*(from an leaflet handed out at the SWP’s Marxism event)*

Here are a few quotes from Pat Stack’s **Socialist Review** article “Anarchy in the UK?” which formed the basis of his talk at **Marxism 2001**. Ask yourself why the SWP leadership systematically lies about anarchism and, more importantly, why its membership lets them get away with it. Can you trust anything they tell you?

“Anarchism... despises the collectivity... By dismissing the importance of the collective nature of change anarchism, of necessity, downplays the centrality of the working class... For... anarchists, revolutions were not about... collective struggle” (Stack)

***“Organise ever more strongly the practical militant solidarity of the workers of all trades in all countries... you will constitute an immense irresistible force when organised and united in the universal collectivity.”*** (Bakunin)

*“To be able to make the revolution, the mass of workers will have to organise themselves. Resistance and the strike are excellent means of organisation for doing this... It is a question of organising societies of resistance for all trades in each town... of giving more solidarity to the workers’ organisations... of federating them.”* (Kropotkin)

“the idea that dominates anarchist thought, namely that the state is the main enemy, rather than identifying the state as one aspect of a class society that has to be destroyed.” (Stack)

***“The Anarchists consider the wage system and capitalist production altogether as an obstacle to progress... while combatting the present monopolisation of land, and capitalism altogether, the Anarchists combat with the same energy the State.”***(Kropotkin)

*“I think that equality must be established... by... the collective ownership of producers’ associations, freely organised and federated into communes... [and] by the development and organisation... of the social power of the working masses... The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.”* (Bakunin)

***“State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs.”*** (Kropotkin)

“For Bakunin ... skilled artisans and organised factory workers, far from being the source of the destruction of capitalism, were ‘tainted by pretensions and aspirations’ ... the ‘uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate’, as he put it, would be his agents for change.” (Stack)

***“Organise the city proletariat ... unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry ... Only a wide-sweeping revolution embracing both the city workers and peasants would be sufficiently strong to overthrow ... the State, backed as it is by all the resources of the possessing classes.”*** (Bakunin)

“Kropotkin, far from seeing class conflict as the dynamic for social change... saw co-operation being at the root of the social process... It follows that if class conflict is not the motor of change, the working class is not the agent and collective struggle not the means.” (Stack)

***“Anarchists... have endeavoured to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation.”*** (Kropotkin)

*“The union is absolutely necessary. It is the only form of workers’ grouping which permits the direct struggle to be maintained against capital without falling into parliamentarism.”* (Kropotkin)

“The huge advantage [anarcho-syndicalists] had over other anarchists was their understanding of the power of the working class, the centrality of the point of production (the workplace) and the need for collective action.” (Stack)

***“To become strong you must unite... nothing less is needed than the union of all local and national workers’ associations into a worldwide association... It means workers’ solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means trades-unions, organisation.”*** (Bakunin)

*“Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers’ organisations which carry on the direct struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector – the State.”* (Kropotkin)

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