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# Through the Looking Glass

Anarchist adventures at Marxism 2001

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August 11, 2008

Retrieved on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021 from [anarchism.pageabode.com](http://anarchism.pageabode.com)  
One anarchist's account of attending the British SWP's Marxism 2001 event. Not a very pleasant experience, but it says a lot about the state of the British left and the politics of Leninism.

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cause more hassle that it may be worth). That way you do not let them determine the agenda and show that there is an alternative – namely a revolutionary working class anarchist movement (with its various national federations, local groups and publications).

It is clear that my and other anarchist's leaflets (and my contributions) had an impact (can I expect something in Socialist Review? Maybe, or maybe they may think its best to ignore the whole thing. Who can tell? If they do do something, they just draw more attention to the fact **one** anarchist had such an impact). That is good, but we need to build on it. The SWP say they want a debate, so lets give it to them. We have the politics and they will be exposed as the authoritarians they are – the worse thing we could do is just ignore them and hope they go away. They will not and the only way we can finally defeat them is when we provide a better alternative to them (and don't forget a lot of people join them because they don't see anything better).

Hopefully my (and the comrades from the Anarchist Federation) work will have paid off and got a few people thinking.

Considering the attempts by the SWP to monopolise and colonise the anti-globalisation movement, I thought that it would be useful to attend **Marxism 2001**. After all, given the events of the past few years (J18, Seattle, May Day, etc.) I thought that it may draw some real people rather than a bunch of party hacks. Armed with two leaflets and some copies of Black Flag and Freedom, I headed off to the event.

## Day One

My first political discussion (if you can call it that) was with a **Spartacus League** member outside the registration building. I was handing out a leaflet (on why Leninism is most definitely **not** "Socialism from Below") when she asked me what kind of anarchist I was and whether I thought that revolt by "disorganised individuals" was enough to win a revolution. I explained that anarchists from Bakunin on supported workers councils as the means of revolution and asked if she knew that. She said she did, so I asked why, then, the nonsense about "disorganised individuals." She then changed track and asked why I opposed Marxism. I said that I did not want to change one set of bosses with another.

But you need leadership, she said, and Trotskyists do not aim for the leaders being new bosses. I then pointed her to numerous quotes in my leaflet by Lenin and Trotsky on the need for party dictatorship (including the classic one by Trotsky that "the revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution" and stressed the "its own" bit). I then started to discuss the disbanding of soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities in the spring of 1918, at which point she had to go.

After handing out a few more leaflets, I went to Alex Callinicos meeting on "Equality." My contribution was simple: There is no equality in a state and so equality means anarchism. I gave a few

examples (no equality between the Cheka and striking workers, no equality in power between the party leaders and the workers). I quoted Lenin from Left-Wing communism (the party “*is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen ... Not a single important issue is decided by any political or organisational question is decided by any State institution ... without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party*”). I indicated Trotsky’s abolition by decree of soldier democracy and Lenin’s replacement of workers control by one-man management as examples of the lack of equality under Bolshevism. I argued that state ownership and private ownership were basically the same, and gave the example of striking workers in Russia being locked out of the factories by the Bolsheviks and so subject to the same inequalities of economic power as in capitalism. This political inequality in power, I noted, soon became a source of economic inequality.

The near silence that marked by departure from the microphone surprised even me. The next contributor informed the faithful that what I had said “was not true,” even though it all was. Nothing like a bit of reality denial! Comrade Alex, needless to say, misinterpreted my position (no, comrade, anarchists do not believe that inequalities in political power is the only source of economic inequality). Nor did he really address my points (and he claimed that Zed Magazine’s Michael Albert was an anarchist, which Albert would be as surprised as I was to discover. However, it does indicate the general level of accuracy at the event). His major point in reply was that Lenin was not happy about this domination by 19 people, although of course the quote said nothing of the kind. It was from **Left-Wing Communism** where used it as evidence in Lenin’s argument that the “*vanguard of the proletariat*” would “seize power” and that to draw a difference between the dictatorship of the masses and of leaders was “*childish nonsense.*” However, the 19 Central Committee members would appear again...

I wasn’t the only anarchist there, of course. The **Anarchist Federation** ([www.afed.org.uk/](http://www.afed.org.uk/)) had a stall and were handing out their

3. Anarchists think the ruling class will disappear (i.e. defence of the revolution)
4. Anarchists don’t recognise differences in political development in the working class
5. Spain (Catalonia, don’t mention Aragon!) showed that anarchism does not work
6. Anarchists quote Lenin and Trotsky out of context (!)

I’m sure there are more (feel free to add any I missed out!). so bear those in mind, and prepare to answer them – as I admit I did in my leaflet (to blow my own trumpet for once). Basically, after a while you know exactly what they are doing to say (they are that repetitive and clone like).

What would I suggest for anarchists attending similar events in the future. Firstly, get organised before hand. Get leaflets produced (the WSM have good ones at their webpage in pdf format). We need more of these. They are an essential resource and should be encouraged! Also, plan what meetings to go to and what to say – going to the right meeting with the right quotes can mean **you** determine the debate (as proved by the “what democracy looks like” meeting and the 19 Central Committee members quote). If one anarchist can have such an impact, think about the possibilities of a collective presence at the meetings (the **Anarchist Federation** – [www.afed.org.uk/](http://www.afed.org.uk/) – stall and leaflets outside were great and show the benefits of group activity, but inside it can have an equal impact). But no surprise there – solidarity is strength!

Also, I think it would be wise to organise your own meeting at the same time and leaflet the event. If the SWP do a meeting on anarchism on 2pm on Saturday, have a meeting nearby after it on the same subject – that way you have a positive alternative and show what a **real** debate looks like. I was thinking you could use one of their rooms (during the hour lunch break, although that may

nonsense they are) and when we produce leaflets exposing the less attractive side of Bolshevism. As Kropotkin once put it, “*basically the words ‘Let us not discuss these theoretical questions’ come down to this: — Do not discuss **our** theory, but help us put it into effect.*” Hence their calls for “unity” and for being “non-sectarian” — it is useful for **them** to be “apolitical” in this case as they have a lot to hide. As such we have to always discuss our/their ideas, our/their history and our differences, in order to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

They, as usual, patronisingly differentiated between the “best of the anarchists” who joined or worked with the Bolsheviks and the rest (who ended up having a group hug with their equals the Cheka). However, I prefer to remember the actual events of 1917 and 1918. The Russian anarchists worked with the Bolsheviks during the summer of 1917 and helped them during the October revolution (“unity against the common enemy, comrades!”). Once in power, the Bolsheviks attacked the anarchists in April 1918 (six weeks before the start of the Civil War). Of course, they did not arrest “real” anarchists and this attack had no effect on the state of the movement. The same system of pacts and betrayals was inflicted on the Makhnovists by the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine. Yes, we are against the same thing, but we obviously are not **for** the same thing. The anti-globalisation movement should remember this and start to be explicitly positive — unless we clarify what we want, the likes of the SWP will use the lack of clear **pro** ideas to try and take it over.

Its also good to be in a position of handing out leaflets which explicitly refute common Trotskyist straw men. It makes them look bad. The most common ones seem to be:

1. Anarchists are against organisation
2. Anarchists are against class struggle

bulletin **Resistance** and a special Globalise Resistance spoof leaflet **Desist**. Other comrades were handing out leaflets for the anarchist bookfair ([www.anarchistbookfair.org](http://www.anarchistbookfair.org)). I had a quick chat with them and they were kind enough to take some of my leaflets for their stall and come along to hand stuff outside the SWP’s “Marxism and Anarchism” meeting, the next one I attended.

This meeting had Pat Stack as main speaker. It was just a repeat of his recent article from **Socialist Review** (as I had hoped, to be honest, as one of my leaflets was a reply to that article). He even decided to add some more inaccurate assertions to his existing hefty amount. These included quoting the Marxist Big Bill Haywood to claim that anarcho-syndicalism rejected insurrection (strange, but you would think a syndicalist who actually was an **anarchist** would have been more appropriate!) and stating that George Sorel was the main theoretician of revolutionary syndicalism (so ignoring that, firstly, he wrote about an **existing** movement, one that had developed before he decided to write about it as he himself admitted. and, secondly, his impact on this existing movement was small, and thirdly, as Sorel himself noted, revolutionary syndicalism effectively started when the anarchists joined the union, and fourthly, the obvious similarities between Bakunin’s ideas and syndicalism, as most historians and anarcho-syndicalists acknowledge).

To give you an idea of what the SWP considers “debate” I will recount its format. Pat Stack gets to speak for 40–45 minutes on anarchism (with at least one lie, error or distortion every sentence). The contributors from the floor get three minutes to make their point. Three whole minutes to reply (wow, true equality!). Debate the issues? How can you when you do not have time to correct the lies?

One thing I did get confirmed was my guess that Stack had just based his account of anarchism on a (very selectively and often incorrectly quoted) Paul Avrich book, **Anarchist Portraits** (for example, Stack forgot to quote Avrich’s comment that Bakunin was

a father of syndicalism). He even had it with him at the meeting and quoted from it. Nothing like going to the source material to build a case!

Three whole minutes to refute 45 minutes of garbage is difficult of course. So I concentrated on the most disgraceful slander, namely that anarchists do not see collective class struggle as the means of social revolution. As I expected, Stack quoted Bakunin saying that the “uncivilised, disinherited, illiterate” were the “flower of the proletariat.” I countered with some historical context (in 1870, over 60% of working people in Spain were illiterate, for example). I then quoted from the article from which this quote is extracted. In it Bakunin argues that the **International Workingmen’s Association** “to be a real power ... must organise the immense majority of the proletariat of Europe, of America, of all lands,” that “the international organisation of economic conflict against capitalism [was] the true aim of this association” and that it was “necessary to unify the scattered forces of the proletariat into an International organisation, a revolutionary power directed against the entrenched power of the bourgeoisie.” This, of course, made a mockery of Stack’s assertion that Bakunin thought that “skilled artisans and organised factory workers” were not the “source of the destruction of capitalism.” This, of course, would soon have been apparent if he had actually been bothered to read any Bakunin before spouting off about his ideas.

I also pointed out that far from arguing for an “instinctive” socialism, as Stack claimed, Bakunin had actually stressed that the class struggle, particularly strikes, were essential for transforming instinct into conscious socialist thought. But I suppose that is what you get when you base yourself on secondary sources.

For Kropotkin, I pointed out Stack’s examples of what Kropotkin thought were “mutual aid” were not, in fact, actually in **Mutual Aid**, but that strikes and unions were. He had even quoted Avrich, who also made it clear that they were not examples of mutual aid either (Stack cannot get even use the secondary source material

last election with the SA (and, no, he didn’t admit that we were more successful!). He claimed that the SA got lots of contacts from their activities and implied that the anarchists did not (not really sure how he knew that, but never mind). However, I think that this will be one of the lines of engagement the SWP will use in the future.

As such, when we are discussing the futility of electioneering we should always best our arguments on clear class struggle analysis – electioneering corrupts the parties involved, generates reformism and bureaucratic tendencies within the party and hinders the creation of self-managed working class organisations. It is not just an ethical position – it is backed up a clear class analysis and an understanding of history. The fate of the German Social Democracy and Green Party should be stressed. Ironically, the quote from the FAI paper on why you should abstain got a rousing cheer at the Spanish Revolution meeting, suggesting that the SA approach has its critics in the SWP (and elsewhere). Simply put, if we can present a clear, coherent, class struggle based argument for anti-parliamentarianism, one based upon historical understanding and examples, with a clear alternative (i.e. direct action, solidarity, self-management) then anarchist ideas can be seen to be relevant, practical and the best way forward.

Another strange contradiction was the SWP’s attempts to both build and burn bridges to anarchists. On the one hand, they stressed in contributions how anarchism and Marxism had a lot in common. One SWP member even said “we are all individuals” (although I managed to resist shouting out “I’m not” in true Monty Python style). On the other, they inflict Pat Stack’s speech on us where he argued that they most definitely did **not** have anything in common. I got the impression they wanted us all to be one big happy family in the anti-globalisation movement (with them as Big Brother?). Which, of course, explains their distorted diatribes against anarchism in their publications! I’m sure they think we are being sectarian when we reply to those attacks (and so expose them for the



the Black Block was “undemocratic” and that a “democratic” leadership was essential. They are **really** pushing this “democratic” leadership line against anarchism (and have done so since at least May Day last year). They clearly think this is the best way to gain influence (and ultimately control), particularly in the “liberal” wing of that movement.

Basically, the Black Block was “undemocratic” because it did its own thing (which is good coming from a party that did its own thing in Prague!). What to make of this? Hypocrisy of course, but we must stress that the Bolshevik “solution” to this means placing power at the top of the movement, in the hands of leaders, which is far more undemocratic than Black Block anarchists (who have been communicating and co-ordinating with other protestors more and more). Ironically, some of the SWP argued that the best thing about the anti-globalisation movement is that it is open! Yes, it respects the kind of diversity the SWP want to abolish! We need to discuss this issue – and the WSM have just printed an article discussing this in issue no. 65 of their paper Workers’ Solidarity. Maybe that could be the basis of the discussion, because the SWP will be pushing this line more and more as time goes on – they obviously think it’s the why to colonise the anti-globalisation movement.

Talking of which, I was talking to a recent recruit to the SWP who was seriously pissed off with them (he said they were far too arrogant, which is true). However, he attended a national internal meeting and Chris Bambery (I think it was) said that the SWP’s aim was to shape the anti-globalisation movement into a mirror of their organisational structure (hence the leadership arguments, I would think). This guy was quite rightly disgusted with this (he thought that the movement should shape itself). No big surprise there, but it’s nice to have our guesses convinced. I gave him leaflets and a copy of Black Flag. Hopefully he, and others, will find out more about anarchism.

Another issue seems to be related to the Socialist Alliance. One contributor compared the anarchist “don’t vote” campaigns in the

correctly!). I stressed that for Kropotkin, mutual aid (i.e. solidarity) was essential in the hostile environment of capitalism and in the class struggle – as would be clear from reading his work, which Stack obviously had never done. I then provided some quotes from Kropotkin on collective class struggle:

*“the workers will have to ... take over all social wealth so as to put it into common ownership. This revolution can only be carried out by the workers themselves.”*

*“[ Anarchists] endeavour to promote their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induce those unions to a direct struggle against capital.”*

*“The chief aim of anarchism is to awaken the constructive powers of the labouring masses ... [and] advise taking an active part in those workers’ organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of labour against capital and its protector, – the State.”*

Yes, indeed, Kropotkin did not think collective class struggle was the means of social revolution, as these and numerous other quotes indicate. But why let facts get in the way of good rant, comrade Stack?

I did get the pleasure of calling Stack a liar to his face, which was nice.

What happened next is interesting. One SWP member said that the anarchist literature being handed out was suggesting that Leninists wanted to impose some horrible dictatorship over the working class, but “*that was not true.*” Never mind all those quotes by Lenin and Trotsky on the need for party dictatorship then! Obviously they were just pulling our leg when they advocated party dictatorship!

When Stack summed up, he stated that he had never said that anarchists rejected collective struggle. Funny, then, that he stated that, for anarchists, “*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.*” Obviously he, like Lenin, was just joking with us – perhaps the SWP will change its name to the Comical Party?

He also raised that issue of the 19 Central Committee members running Russia. He said that Lenin did not like it (not that you could tell this from **Left-wing Communism**, indeed the opposite is the case, but why let some facts get in the way? After all, they haven't before). Stalin, he informed us, got rid of that and replaced it with one man dictatorship. But, then again, Lenin did stress the need for one-man management (armed with dictatorial powers) for the workers. Stalin was just introducing that "efficient" principal within the central committee. If its good enough for the proles, why not the vanguard?

And the major difference between Lenin's regime and Stalin's? Well, Lenin introduced lots of things Stack liked, while Stalin did the opposite. Which, incidentally, just proved the anarchist point. The slogan was "*all power to the Soviets*", **not** "*all power to Lenin*." I also handed out hundreds of the second leaflet, which exposed the distortions and lies contained in Stack's **Socialist Review** article.

So remember, 45 minutes speeches followed by ten three minute contributions, followed by 10–15 minutes summing up by the speaker, is what the SWP thinks is a "debate." And remember, equality means following the orders of the Central Committee and the comrade from the Cheka is your equal (particularly when he is putting you up against the wall for daring to strike against your equals in the Communist Party who are exercising their dictatorship over you). And, of course, when Lenin and Trotsky talked about the inevitable need for party dictatorship (and implemented it), they just didn't mean it, honest.

## Day Two: the Odyssey continues

I was originally going to go to the meeting "**Has the internet replaced other ways of organising?**" simply for a laugh (after all, who actually argues that?). Instead I decided to go to the Irish SWP's Kieran Allen's "This is what democracy looks like" and I

So why **this** particular straw man? Simply because it contains the rationale for party power/dictatorship (as argued by Lenin and Trotsky). The working class is politically divided, the vanguard contains all the "best" elements and so they should take power. Indeed, one comrade informed us that the revolution will see the workers' state repressing the "backward" elements of the working class (it is refreshing to see that admitted, although it is hard to combine with Lenin's claim that the transition to communism meant "*the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploited majority*"). Needless to say, we have the political position that justifies party dictatorship as any worker who disagrees with the vanguard is, by definition, "backward."

Yes, political differences exist and the revolution will see the working class split – but there is a clear difference in acknowledging uneven political development while supporting workers' self-management and acknowledging it and using it to justify party power (and ultimately dictatorship). Easier to just distort the anarchist position than actually address the issues it raises.

Which shows the importance of leafleting these things. It is a lot harder for the Leninists to slander anarchism when you are handing out leaflets that explicitly deny their assertions. This "uneven political development" was raised so many times that it is clearly the next big SWP argument against anarchism – comrades beware!

Other straw men were the usual ones. Listen, Leninist, anarchists favour organisation, class struggle, workers direct action, solidarity, self-organisation and collective management of society. Deal with these facts and move on. Repeatedly denying them will convince only party hacks who no longer can think. Similarly, anarchists argue that the revolution needs to organise to co-ordinate struggle and defence of the revolution. We've been arguing that since Bakunin. Please change the record and debate whether our ideas are applicable rather than deny our basic position!

The other trend for the future I identified was the SWP line on the "anti-capitalist" movement. They raised numerous times that

world in our hearts and it is growing every minute — that’s why the SWP distort our ideas at their meetings.

## Concluding thoughts

Was it worth going to? This is easy to answer – yes, it was. This is for two reasons, one personal, one political.

The personal one wasn’t calling Pat Stack a liar (although that **was** fun). It was simply that going drove home how fundamentally undemocratic the SWP actually is. No real debate was possible due to the set-up of the meetings. Having three minutes to reply to a 45 minute diatribe is a joke. If they wanted a **real** debate about anarchism, for example, they would have had 15 minutes for a party member and 15 minutes for an anarchist, followed by 30 minutes of discussion and 5 minutes each to sum up. That was not done, for obvious reasons – it is easier to control the debate by the methods used.

Politically, it was good to go as anarchist ideas did get to people who normally may not have heard them. If an anarchist gets up and calls the speaker a liar, perhaps that will get the listener thinking. Combined with leaflets explaining **why** they are a liar, then that has a potential impact far greater than just three minutes of summarising a lengthier case.

The most frequently used straw man argument was that anarchists do not see that the working class is politically divided (“uneven development”) and so we are utopian. Of course, anarchists are aware of this fact (just as we are aware of other facts like the sun rises in the East). We are aware of the need for political organisation and anarchist propaganda, to take part in and influence the class struggle, the need to win people to our ideas (if we did not, then why were there anarchists at Marxism 2001 in the first place?).

am **so** glad I did. I managed to turn this meeting into a **de facto** anarchism versus Leninism one, much to the obvious annoyance of the speaker and associated party hacks.

Planning ahead, I knew exactly what my contribution to this debate was going to be. I was going to compare the rhetoric of Leninism versus its reality. The speaker said that recall was a fundamental fact of Marxist politics. I countered with the classic quote by Trotsky that the “*revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution.*” Where is recall and democracy there?

I stressed that anarchists base their politics on self-managed working class organisations (Kropotkin pointed to the directly democratic “sections” of the Great French revolution, Bakunin to self-managed unions), that we had supported recallable, mandated delegates and workers’ councils since the 1860s and that **real** “democracy” means self-management and that means anarchism.

Then my account of how the Bolsheviks had acted as non-democratically as the capitalist system the speaker had attacked definitely pissed off a few people. I talked about the destruction of democracy in the army by Trotsky’s decree, of workers’ self-management by Lenin’s appointed one-man managers with dictatorial powers, and the disbanding of soviets with elected non-Bolshevik majorities. This clearly made them squirm. And, of course, the following contributors failed to acknowledge my comment that this had happened **before** the start of the civil war – it was ignored by them all! They just don’t listen, do they?

After a few contributions, the chair announced that time was running out and that we had time for two more people. I asked whether I had the right to reply – sorry, no, came the reply. Luckily for me, the next contributor said he just wanted to ask a question and wanted to hear my comments. He let me have his time. His question was simply that he had never heard my facts before and he was under the impression that the Russian Revolution was democratic – significant in itself.

So, armed with three minutes the comrades did not want me to have, I reminded them that the Bolshevik attacks started before the 22 capitalist armies had invaded (22, or 12, or 14, the number varied all weekend). I discussed Spain and quoted Trotsky's recommendation that "*because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship*" (needless to say, I stressed the "*for themselves*" bit). I indicated the grim reality facing the CNT in Catalonia on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1936 (either implement libertarian communism and fight the fascists **and** the republic **and** international capitalism or collaborate against Franco), stressing it was a mistake but an understandable one. I also raised the example of Aragon as anarchism in action (which, of course, was ignored).

The last contributor agreed with Trotsky on the dictatorship of the CNT leaders – because they "*represented the workers.*" How easy it is for a Bolshevik to advocate party dictatorship! So much for "**workers power.**" In response to my comment that at least the CNT did not impose a party dictatorship, Franco's dictatorship was raised. Yes, Franco was so much worse than Stalin! It also seems strange to raise the question of Franco's dictatorship as this was **precisely** the reason why the CNT collaborated in the first place – but never mind logic!

Instead of summing up on "**What democracy looks like**", we were subjected to a diatribe on anarchism – or, more correctly, what the speaker **thought** anarchism was. He asserted that we opposed organisation (wrong comrade), class power and struggle (wrong again, comrade) and that we had no idea that we needed to defend a revolution (again, wrong comrade). Indeed, all his inventions were refuted in black and white on the leaflet I was handing out! Our Irish comrade argued that we cannot dismiss Bolshevism by pointing to historical events or by quoting Lenin (although he did urge us to read "**State and Revolution**" – as my leaflet said, "*while the Leninists ask you to judge them by their manifesto, anarchists say judge them by their record!*"). Perhaps the Irish anarchists

admitted that the membership of the CNT generally was in favour of anti-fascist unity (Franco was, of course, considered the main threat). Admitting that meant that their case against anarchism fell apart – how could they turn round and say the threat of fascism played no role in the CNT's decision (as originally implied). And how could they say it was anarchist politics when those very same politics had formed the Council of Aragon?

So instead of addressing the points I raised, we were subjected to the same old nonsense about needing "centralised state power" and the blindingly obvious fact that Aragon was crushed because it was isolated (as the CNT in Catalonia had feared would happen to them if they had went the whole hog). The old myth that anarchists just want to seize the means of production and ignore the state was raised again (obviously, for the SWP, if you repeat a lie often enough it becomes true). Never mind that it was never an anarchist or CNT position and that the seizing of the factories came about **after** the CNT leadership had decided to put off introducing libertarian communism until after Franco was defeated. The SWP confuse this event with the programme of the CNT while, in fact, it was only **part** of it (and done independently, even **against**, the wishes of the leadership). The other part was destruction of the state by a federation of workers councils and free communes (as happened in Aragon).

When I asked for the chance to reply, it was denied to me (time considerations, of course). Simply put, the SWP wanted to control the debate and ensure that those with opposing perspectives are not given a real chance to respond to the comments by their members – needless to say, if I could reply to a few of their straw men arguments would have been set alight and we cannot have that...

Ironically, after stressing that the SWP supported the "anarcho-syndicalist" wing of the CNT against the "insurrectionist" wing, the speaker ended by quoting those famous words of that insurrectionist anarcho-syndicalist Durruti. Yes, anarchists do have a new

**tion and Counter-Revolution in Spain**). That, of course, was simply false – as I went on to explain.

I started by arguing that anarchists agree with Bakunin that the revolution meant that the state had to be destroyed (and that the CNT had not done this). I summarised the anarchist revolution by quoting Bakunin: *“the federative Alliance of all working men’s associations... will constitute the Commune.”* The *“Revolutionary Communal Council”* will be composed of delegates *“vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.”* These communes will send delegates *“vested with similar mandates to constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces... to organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction... the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence... will bring about the triumph of the revolution.”*

Then I argued that the CNT refused to do this – and I explained why by quoting from the 1937 report to the AIT (the CNT had a *“difficult alternative: to completely destroy the state, to declare war against the Rebels, the government, foreign capitalists ... or collaborating”*). That was the reality facing the CNT – not the speakers a-historic pondering of Garcia Oliver quotes!

I then contrasted Catalonia to Aragon – same organisation, same politics, different results. How could the CNT politics be blamed for the mess in Catalonia when it had applied them in Aragon? That position could not be logically argued (and, unsurprisingly, my argument was essentially ignored). I stressed the continuity of what happened in Aragon and the Friends of Durruti’s politics with the 1936 Zaragoza Resolution on Libertarian Communism. Again, this was ignored.

So how could anarchism have “failed” when it was ignored in Catalonia (for fear of fascism) and applied in Aragon? Quite a bombshell – and not remotely addressed by the speakers that came next (how could it be?). It also gave the SWP a problem – how could they downplay objective circumstances in Spain when that is their only defence of Leninism in Russia? Indeed, the speaker

of the **Workers Solidarity Movement** could talk to Mr. Allen and actually let him know what anarchism really stands for? He is obviously in need for some education...

The Irish comrade claimed that anarchists just randomly selected quotes and events and used them to attack Leninism. Of course, in three minutes you can hardly present a fully referenced and comprehensive account of the failures of the Russian Revolution, but that time limitation was hardly **my** fault! What I had to do was select events and quotes which summarised the problems with Bolshevism and that is what I did. Concentrating on the events prior to the Civil War was necessary as it showed that the authoritarian actions of the Bolsheviks were not driven exclusively by the White forces. Similarly, the lessons Lenin and Trotsky drew from their experiences were so diametrically opposed to their pre-October rhetoric that it is essential to raise it. If, as the speaker argued, Leninism had a fundamental basis in workers democracy, how could Lenin and Trotsky argue for party dictatorship and how did this relate to their claims in 1917?

You also get an idea of the priorities of the SWP by the speaker’s comments on anarchism. He claimed that if he were critiquing anarchism he would not quote the sexist views of Proudhon (I will ignore the fact that the SWP has done and does do precisely this). Rather, he said, he would present a full socio-historic analysis of anarchism and not base his case on Proudhon’s sexism. Interesting that he equates Proudhon’s sexism with Lenin’s and Trotsky’s advocating of party dictatorship! It appears that arguing for (and implementing) a party dictatorship is equal in the scale of things as being sexist. I won’t insult the intelligence of the reader by explaining why this shows that the SWP has a decidedly screwed up idea of what is important. Not that I am denying the importance of fighting sexism, I stress, but one person’s sexism is dwarfed by an ideological commitment to party dictatorship. I’m mentioning this so that the SWP cannot claim I’m “soft” on sexism or I am sexist.

Sexism is an evil that we must fight and abolish (and Proudhon was full of shit on this issue).

Presenting a socio-historic analysis of Leninism, including an account of the Russian Revolution, in three minutes would have been somewhat difficult. I tried my best, but obviously I had to be somewhat selective. For example, I had mentioned that Trotsky had tried to ban the soviet congresses that the Makhnovists tried to hold – it seems strange that the “soviet power” was banning soviet democracy, to say the least. And if the Makhnovists could organise congresses, then why could the Bolsheviks not do so? Clearly because they did not want to (as Trotsky’s banning order showed). Is this cherry-picking events and quotes? Hardly, it is an example of the autocratic tendencies of Bolshevism in practice and it clearly shows that “objective circumstances” cannot totally explain their actions.

In summary, it seems strange that one anarchist, armed with the facts, could have such an impact. The meeting almost became a **real** debate (real debate at Marxism 2001 shock!). And that was only due to the generous action of a fellow worker!

I started handing out leaflets at the end of the meeting – simply so I could counter the inaccurate nonsense spouting from the obviously flustered speaker. I was politely informed that I could not sell papers. So I asked if I could hand out leaflets. Sorry, no. My attempts to explain that the speaker was lying about anarchism and so the leaflet was essential fell on deaf ears. The SWP team member explained that this rule applied even to **Socialist Worker** paper sellers (as if that was a great concession as the speakers would hardly be misrepresenting those politics!). Outside the room, people were selling Bookmarks books, so I joined them – only to be informed to stop and that the no selling rule did not apply to them. True equality in action!

Over all, an interesting experience. I discovered that you can not quote Lenin or Trotsky, or mention their actions, unless you have nice things to say about them. If you stress “objective circum-

stances” then any action becomes justifiable (unless, of course, you are the CNT-FAI). Not much hope, then, for the future as every revolution will face difficult objective circumstances... So Bolshevism **would** have been fine if it wasn’t for those meddling capitalists...

The next meeting I attended was the one on “*Anarchism and the Spanish revolution.*” Actually, it wasn’t **too** bad (I know, SWP standards are dropping!). Needless to say, there were mistakes and distortions but far fewer than I expected (indeed, they had lots of nice things to say about the CNT and even suggested it had an organisational structure and spirit which had a lot to teach us!). Needless to say, the crux of the critique was the old “the CNT opposed the state, that is why they collaborated” line. Equally predictable, they trotted out the appropriate Garcia Oliver quote to provide evidence (without indicating it was from one year later, when the CNT had changed considerably).

There was **so** much to reply to of course. I could have pointed out that Trotsky had abolished democracy in the Red Army, making Trotskyist support for the CNT militias deeply ironic. I would have mentioned that Lenin had undermined the workers self-management the speaker had praised the Spanish anarchists for introducing (again, somewhat ironic). I could have indicated that the “workers’ state” in Russia was not, in fact, run nor controlled by the workers and that Lenin had argued for party dictatorship. I could have corrected some the charges of sectarianism levelled against the CNT (no mention that the UGT “Workers’ Alliances” were designed for socialist control, for example). I could have said that the reason why union halls were closed in Catalonia in the 1934 rising was due to state repression by those leading the revolt, but all that would have been essentially trivia.

So I went for the key error of his account – the difference between Catalonia and Aragon. His great error was to maintain, like so many Trotskyists that the CNT had “made their revolution” in Catalonia by seizing the means of production and ignoring the state (an error due to Felix Morrow’s inaccurate assertions in **Revolu-**