

Anarchism and Marxism in the Russian Revolution

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Contents

Abstract	3
Germany and Russia	5
The Evolution of Social Democracy	10
War and Mutiny	14

Abstract

The intellectual history of the debate between Anarchism and Marxism has its own fascination as a story of two elaborate idea systems in perpetual and inevitable conflict. Yet they seem to share the same theory of the state. Bakunin brought Machiavelli into the discussion and advanced, along with Jan Waclaw Machajski, a critique of Social Democracy as the ideology of the Intelligentsia. Both these impulses found their way into the Marxism of the Bolsheviks. The two great idea systems both endorsed the Paris Commune and for a time the revolutions of 1917. A neglected dimension in historical studies is the attitudes of the two ideologies toward the great states and the balance of power. Marxism pinned its hopes on the rise of Germany, Anarchism on the defence of France, the land of the great revolution. The war of 1914 changed all the valences, with the two ideologies pitted against all the great states. Ironically, Anarchism can be seen as playing a role in saving Russia for its later struggle against fascism.

The revolutionary events that shook Russia and the world in 1917 had already been germinating in the minds of several generations of Russian intellectuals, at least since the time of the Decembrist revolt against the Tsardom in 1825. Like their revolutionary counterparts in Western Europe, much of the Russian intelligentsia often thought like anarchists. They advocated direct action and denounced parliamentarism of the Western type as a dangerous diversion by Western liberalism that would further ensnare the Russia masses, even if it might succeed in overthrowing absolute monarchy. So one can say that anarchism was a lively intellectual force among Russian revolutionaries, as it was in the West. But in Russia unorthodox ideas had to be thought in private, in a conspiracy over the kitchen table, in bed under the covers, or in exile. Russia never had a proper platform for politics, radical or otherwise. No reform bills as in England in 1832 and 1867, no universal suffrage as in France after 1848, no parliamentary influence on monarchy as in Prussia and united Germany after 1871, no legal trade unions, and no legal socialdemocracy. Anarchists joined in the criticism of Western 'opportunism' and of the mere idea of it in Russia. Perhaps their extremism owes to a peculiarly quarrelsome Russian nature, as Western radicals at the time often thought, fairly or unfairly. At any rate, in view of the above, it may not be so odd that Russians like Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin were such extremists and so prominent as international theorists of the anarchist idea.

In its earlier voicings and in the writings of Bakunin, Kropotkin and their successors anarchism presented a sophisticated and multifaceted theory of the state, a ruthless, 'scientific' (in that it was based on economics) critique, one that exhibited even more enthusiasm for class analysis than the Marxists were accustomed to entertain, in fact including Marxists themselves on the list of enemies as current misleaders and potential future tyrants and bureaucrats. It was a philosophy of power logically suited for an age of revolution, if one thinks that way of the period that connects the French revolution, through the revolutions of 1848 to the Paris Commune to the Russian revolution, including in one's purview the Italian Risorgimento, the revolution in Iran in 1906, the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908, and the Chinese and Mexican revolutions of 1911, up to the arrival of Lenin at Petrograd's Finland Station in April 1917. The role of the anarchists in the world upheaval, as they saw it, was not merely to make propaganda for revolution but to organise the labour movement to abolish capitalism.

Why were Russians like Bakunin and Kropotkin so prominent? What was so special about Russia? Bakunin thought that Russians and other Slavs, along with Latin peoples, loved freedom instinctively and therefore fought the state, whereas the Germans saw everything through the lens of the state, and indeed defined freedom as harmony within the state. We do not take Bakunin's remarks very seriously today. But there remains the related question: why did anarchism succeed in winning the trade unions in France, Spain, and to a lesser extent, Italy, while Marxism won in Germany? Is this not roughly Bakunin's schema? Max Nomad once told me that agitators of his generation often asked the same question and answered it simply by saying that anarchists got to the working class first in Spain, for example, and Marxists in Germany. This is intuitive: workers value their trade unions so much that they follow their union leaders into politics. Or: formation of a union is at once an economic act and an ideological one, an act of rebellion that must be accompanied by a transvaluation of values, an entirely new outlook on society.

Yet, also buried in Bakunin's remark about the European 'races' is the factor of religion. In the parts of Europe where there had been no Reformation, or where the Reformation had been defeated, the first step in any act of any sinful defiance to authority was to denounce the priest as a hangman in a cassock. Anticlericalism thus plays an outsized role in anarchist propaganda and succeeds best where the church is still seemingly unchallenged, in Spain of the Counter-Reformation legacy or Russia with its Byzantine Caesaro-Papism, that is, its sense of the holy role of political power.

European radicals of Bakunin's day would have made this point more strongly. Russia was generally regarded by them as Europe's most grinding tyranny. In a discussion in Paris of the 1830s among café types like Marx, Proudhon, Bakunin, and other interpreters of the Hegelian contribution to revolutionary ideas, Russia would have been judged according to a Whig analysis like that of Alexis de Tocqueville. No Renaissance, no Reformation, no real Enlightenment, no free city states, no charters of the nobility, no real limits on the power of the crown. In fact, the Russian monarchy turned the nobility into a servitor class and even a kind of bureaucracy. Russia was an anti-model in terms of Tocqueville's notion of freedom residing in the nobility and its legal distance from the crown. This was more or less also the Whig interpretation of British freedom dating from the Magna Carta, against which other European states were found to be sadly lacking. It was shared in the discourse on the relative development of the European states by most radicals and especially by Marxists, down to Georgi Plekhanov in the 1880s, Lenin and Peter Struve at the turn of the century, and even Trotsky, whose theory of the Permanent Revolution assumes that Russia, lacking the free nobility and bourgeoisie to have won freedom for the Russian society, would have to be liberated by the working class.¹

Russia was, in addition, the most reactionary European state when anarchism and Marxism were emerging, the victor over the French revolution, the mainstay of a 'balance of power' that, according to Prince Clemens von Metternich of Austria, had the Christian duty to intervene all over Europe against any aftershocks of the French revolution that might threaten the legitimacy of a sitting monarch. Russia played this role up to the point of its intervention in 1849 to crush Hungarian separatism and save the Habsburg monarchy. For the radicals of Europe, as well as many liberals and progressives, news of a revolution in Russia would have fallen like a caress on

¹ Anthony D'Agostino, *The Russian Revolution, 1917–1945* (Santa Barbara and London: Praeger, 2012), chap. 1.

their ears. That is, one did not have to be an anarchist to hope for the smashing of the Russian state.

A discussion of the role of anarchism in the Russian revolution has this necessary setting as its presupposition. Marxists, or rather a special and new kind of Marxists, the Bolsheviks, in the end set up the revolutionary power after October 1917 and this ultimately resulted in the crushing of the anarchist idea in Russia. A reflexive conclusion would suggest that we should think of anarchism and Bolshevism as two opposed idea systems locked in combat since their inception and having it out during the Russian civil war of 1918–1921. One does indeed encounter this interpretation in many historical accounts, especially in those where the historian is engaged in an attempt to save the reputation of the anarchists. The story of anarchism and Bolshevism is, however, not quite like that and is worth considering without the customary blinders.

The relationship was more intimate. Alongside the inherent antagonism, there was also more of an exchange of conceptions, usually a confused one, than is often recognised. The Bolshevism that emerged from the events of the Russian civil war was to be cut off from its moorings in nineteenth-century social democracy, moorings to which it never succeeded in returning even in the Gorbachev era. Russian Communism of the Soviet era was of course *sui generis*, but if one wonders about its continuity with the past, it was perhaps more the heir of the anarchism of the nineteenth century than of social democracy. The intellectual history of the two doctrines, anarchism and Marxism, while it contains two stories, really should be understood historically as one.

Germany and Russia

Marxism and anarchism grew up under similar influences in the period between the defeat of Napoleon and the revolutions of 1848. Engels, in his *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, suggested three sources and component parts for the Marxist ‘synthesis’: French socialism, British political economy, and German philosophy. This would be equally true for anarchism. Proudhon, and after him, Bakunin were engaged in the same intellectual encounter as Marx. All accepted French socialism in the form that Gracchus Babeuf had given it in the 1790s, revolutionary democracy returning with collectivist conceptions of property. Marx overcame Proudhon’s interpretation of British political economy, even while a number of Proudhon’s notions continue to resound today, for example, the idea of ‘constituted value’ as the basis of money, that all money is basically temple money, established by political authority in the sense of Quantitative Easing, or Bitcoin. This might be called the Hegemony Theory of Money, according to which the nation with the military and political hegemony in the world is alone permitted to enjoy the advantages of a seigniorial money, the status the dollar currently enjoys. Marx’s political economy prevailed not because of his presumed ‘victory’ over Proudhon, whose philosophy still retained its hold over the French trade unions. Bakunin accepted Marx’s political economy, at least in its general outlines. As to Hegelian dialectic, Bakunin originally shared the view that it was the algebra of revolution but later dismissed Marx’s logic as hopelessly enmeshed with German metaphysics.

This critique and counter-critique makes for an exercise in intellectual history of relevance to the story of anarchism and Marxism. Instead of pursuing it here for its own sake, however, it may also be useful to consider the aspect of the anarchism-Marxism relationship that is not a

literary debate between competing theoretical models but which relates to what anarchists and Marxists said about contemporary states and their alignment in war and peace.

Not to suggest that revolutionaries were really at bottom analysts of international politics and the balance of power. On the contrary they seemed to regard these as aspects of the general crisis of society to which revolution would presumably put an end. All the radicals who were to experience the revolutions of 1848 in their youth, saw the French revolution as a more or less permanent condition to which society was returning after its recovery from the events of the Napoleonic era. They thought themselves part of a kind of international fraternity with revolutionaries from every country bringing their own expectations about what their country would contribute. They thought, for example, that a revolutionary unification of the Germanies would be immediately followed by a German declaration of war on reactionary Russia in order to permit a new Polish state to emerge, this in the spirit of internationalist duty. Destruction of Russian power would put an end to the alliance of the three eastern absolutisms, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, powers that had partitioned Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. France would be liberated from the deadly European coalition of monarchies and would resume its role in furthering the revolution. They viewed the failure of the revolutions of 1848, and especially the action of Russia in helping the eastern monarchies to survive, as the deepest tragedy.

Were they right about that? Most of the history that was assigned in my student days referred to 1848 as a 'turning point that failed to turn', in A. J. P. Taylor's ringing phrase.² But what about Napoleon the Third who came to power as a result of the revolution, which he helped partially to suppress? Was Bonapartism not a part of the French revolution? Not the most radical part, to be sure, yet the return of Bonapartism, even in its new form, this time abjectly tailing Britain, was to turn Europe upside down in the next twenty years, defeating Russia in Crimea, enabling the Risorgimento in Italy, striking such blows to conservative Austria as would prove to weaken her fatally, and permitting in an indirect way the unification of Germany that failed in 1848. Was this not a conservative way of fulfilling the dreams of 1848?

The answer, at the time, was no. Radicals universally rejected all these thoughts and denounced Louis Bonaparte as a miserable tyrant. Marx was in the front rank. Even so, he loved the Crimean war against Russia (started by Louis Napoleon) and told the British workers that their cause would be served by support for the British state (allied with France) in the war effort. He denounced Palmerston as a Russian agent, claiming he had been too soft on Russia. Marx and Engels opposed the Risorgimento because it was initiated by a French war against Austria in 1859. Engels wrote in a pamphlet, *The Rhine and the Po*, that Napoleon the Third endangered Prussia by his war with Austria. Looking at it from the standpoint of what he called 'our cause', that is, the cause of German nationalism, he defended Austria as an extension of German power. This was the Austria of the 'Vienna System', the force defending monarchism throughout Europe. Gladstone once asked whether one could put one's finger on a spot on the map and say, 'there Austria did good', and concluded that one could not. Yet Engels saw Austrian defeat in the Italian revolution as a hindrance to German nationalism.

In the days when Marxism was taking shape as a dense critique of political economy that would establish Marx's intellectual authority with the German and British workers, Marx viewed the rise of German power in Bismarck's wars of national liberation as a relatively positive development for the workers of the world. One of its features, he told Engels, was that, in the victory

² A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 68.

of the North German Confederation over France in 1871, the German proletariat would have in a sense got the upper hand over the French proletariat. It would constitute on a world scale 'the predominance of our theory over Proudhon's'.³

These were the same days when Bakunin was elaborating his theory of anarchism. He had not been an anarchist in 1848. He shared the assumptions of the rest of the radicals of the time, including those of Marx. The liberation of Poland from the clutches of Russia would serve, thought Bakunin, as a point of departure for the formation of a Slavic federation made up of new states separating from Russia and Austria. After his arrest and imprisonment for taking part in a rising in Dresden, he was to spend the next eleven years in Russian prison and exile. In his famous *Confession*, he tries to convince the Tsar that his ideas about Slavic federation could be made flesh in the policy of a liberal and benevolent Russian monarchy.⁴ Sent into exile after the death of Nicholas the First and the succession of Aleksandr the Second, who was to free the Russian serfs in 1861, Bakunin found himself in the Russian Far East in the custody of General Nikita Muraviëv, his cousin, the freebooting governor who annexed the Amur Valley for Russia. Bakunin massaged the ego and built up the pretensions of his host, Muraviëv Amursky.

Perhaps he was dissimulating in order to find a way to slip out and make an escape, as he later did. Still, together with the *Confession*, the episode probably shows that people will say almost anything to get out of prison. We have today the example of the hapless Abdullah Öcalan, leader and theorist of Kurdish nationalism, who writes from a Turkish jail, as he has for the last seventeen years, that Kurdish nationalists should adopt the anarchist ideas of Murray Bookchin. The Bakunin-Muraviëv episode also shows that even revolutionary thought can be construed in various ways as it relates to national causes and interests. So, just as Marxism could be thought compatible with a powerful rising Germany, so Bakuninism, at least in its pre-anarchist form, could also be thought compatible with a rising Russia.

On Bakunin's escape in 1861, he tried to resume his revolutionary activities in Europe. For him the causes of 1848 were still alive. When the Tsar Liberator Aleksandr the Second freed the serfs in 1861, Polish landlords of the eastern provinces rose in revolt in 1863. This time they were suppressed by an agreement between Russia and neighbouring Prussia, the Convention of Alvensleben that coordinated police and troop action against the Polish revolt and crushed it completely. The convention was, as it turned out, a godsend for Prince Bismarck of Prussia, in that it laid a basis for Russian cooperation and permitted him to win Russian neutrality in his wars against Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and France in 1870. Without these wars, he could not have unified the Germans. Without Russian willingness to localise his wars, Bismarck might have failed in the face of a hostile coalition. Watching this unfold, Bakunin saw clearly the rebirth of a new Holy Alliance against revolution, or as his later book title had it, *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*. He also concluded that the cause of Polish nationalism was not as it had been supposed and was in fact really the cause of the Polish nobility. So much for the grand illusion of national revolt of 1848 and the 'springtime of the peoples'.

Out of Bakunin's disillusionment came a series of deeper and more thoroughgoing reflections about the nature of the state, reflections that formed a theory of anarchism. Bakunin became a kind of radical realist. He said that Machiavelli had been right after all. The Florentine was the first philosopher to properly understand the state and its need for a transcendent morality,

³ Marx to Engels, 20 July 1870, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_07_20.htm.

⁴ Michel Bakounine, *Confession* (Paris, 1932); Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

‘reason of state’ divorced from normal human ethics. To strengthen its hold over the people, the sovereign state needed a religion with a sovereign, inscrutable God, holding wicked sinners in thrall. Every state hoped to use these devices to achieve mastery over the other states. But no one had succeeded thus far. There was no universal state. The dream of Popes Gregory the Seventh and Boniface the Eighth, of the Emperor Charles the Fifth and of Napoleon had come to nothing. When one spoke of the world of international affairs, one necessarily spoke, as Carl Schmitt would put it sixty years later, ‘not of a universe but of a pluriverse’.⁵ The fragmented state system created a condition where the most powerful state would have no recourse but to pursue a policy of balance of power toward the others, to set them at odds, supporting now one side and now another the better to advance its own sacred interests. So states strive for mastery, not for stability and equilibrium. Their device is constant war.

The contemporary student of international relations theory will quickly recognise what is nowadays usually called offensive realism. International affairs is a realm ‘where the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must’. Sometimes the realist starts with Thucydides’s famous phrase as a given. The way Bakunin stated it, there is even a kind of implicit correction of Marx and the idea of class struggle, where for Marx the state is the exact official summary of class relations and national interest is reducible to the interest of the ruling class, while for Bakunin classes arise within the state and internal situations in the life of the state necessarily flow from its external situation.⁶ The state is autonomous from the standpoint of the ruling elite and takes its shape mainly as a result of its conflicts with other states. Bakunin’s formulae have a certain filiation with ideas of Proudhon, such as, for example, money as ‘Constituted value’. The logic is state logic not economic logic.

Were Bakunin’s ideas a response to the rise of the *Dreikaiserbund*, a League of the Three Emperors of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, joined in 1872 in a kind of conservative Holy Alliance? This while Marx thought in terms of Germany evolving toward British ideas? Not to doubt that they were sincere revolutionaries. At any rate, neither Bakunin nor today’s offensive realists really offer insights beyond the ABCs about international alignments of the period before the First World War. Bakunin’s thoughts about statism do correspond to some of the German ideas about the superiority of force that Engels criticised at length in his *Anti-Dühring*. Marx himself allowed, in the *Grundrisse*, that some elements of Eurasian history suggested the autonomy of the state. ‘There is a prevalent tradition that in certain periods, robbery constituted the only source of living. But in order to be able to plunder, there must first be something to plunder’. Still, occasionally, Marx allowed, there is ‘determination of production by distribution’.⁷

Bakunin, on his side, accepted Marx’s critique of British Political Economy. That is, he accepted it, as did the Russian populist radicals, as a cautionary tale about capitalism to which revolution would provide an alternative. The debate between Bakunin and Marx was a debate among socialists. Bakunin fully accepted that class struggle was fundamental. He concentrated on the urban workers and their unions and promised that they would run the society of the future. He was a forerunner, with Proudhon, of the anarcho-syndicalism that emerged in the 1890s.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (1932) (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 53.

⁶ M. A. Bakunin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Izd-vo Vsesoiuznogo Obshchestva Politicheskikh Katorzhan i Ssyl’no-Poselentsev, n.d.), vol. 1, 45.

⁷ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1904), 288–289. Anthony D’Agostino, *Marxism and the Russian Anarchists* (San Francisco: Germinal, 1977), ch 2.

But he also looked beyond the proletariat. He could be equally impressed by insurgent peasants, radical students, sincerely indignant liberals, *déclassés* of all classes, proletarians and lumpenproletarians. His Machiavellian view of power, he thought, did not have to be taught to any of these. They would feel it instinctively.

There is a passage in Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, in a chapter on the revolt of 1378, in which Machiavelli imagines a poor worker attempting to rouse a crowd in rebellion. 'Those who conquer never incur shame for having done so', the agitator says, 'and of conscience we ought to take no account'. Nor should we fear Hell, he goes on to say. The rich have got what they have 'by force and fraud'. We ought therefore to use force when opportunity offers. None ever escape servitude 'but the faithless and the bold'. The course is dangerous, but where they threaten us with prison, torture, and death, 'boldness becomes prudence'. Machiavelli was only using his imagination to guess about the plight of the uneducated plebeians. But this is Bakunin's kind of revolutionism. One can imagine 'the modern Satan', addressing the crowd in front of the Dresden City Hall in 1849 in just this way. Bakunin was the exponent of a kind of Machiavellianism from below.⁸

Even revolutionary democrats, said Bakunin, were not entirely to be trusted. In the French revolution, the Jacobins had tried to set up a dictatorship over the masses, had broken their nascent trade unions, and had made the preparations for a state religion. Democrats were statist at bottom. Marxists followed the same rubric as democrats. They were willing to make all the compromises necessary for a bourgeois democratic state. And this was not the last of the betrayals of Marxism. Even should they ever actually get the power, they would move toward a centralised regime directed in the final analysis by state managers, superintendents, engineers, and the like, a regime of 'savants' employing all the most efficient methods to regiment the masses, under the rubric of science. It would be a dictatorship of science.

Bakunin was attacking Marxist 'scientific socialism' as if it were Saint-Simonian socialism. Henri de Saint-Simon and his followers had talked this way, calling for the rule of scientific intellect. Saint-Simonians were prominent in the French government of Napoleon the Third, a regime that was modernising Paris as Bakunin wrote by a vast programme of public works, very much to the approval of French construction unions, some of them ideologically Proudhonist. It is often thought that Bakunin had identified some secret in Marxism, and perhaps he had, but not the secret of the later crimes of Stalinism in Russia. If there was a secret, it was that of the role of the savants. Anarchists were to expand on the critique of Marxist social democracy as the potential threat of dictatorship by a Saint-Simonian bureaucracy of white collar workers and managers. But any trade unionists, that is, trade unionists led by any ideology, Marxist, Proudhonist, or otherwise, would have been delighted with a regime of ambitious public works such as Napoleon the Third provided with the advice and approval of the same savants.

The Second Empire was not to last. This was not the fault of any presumed economic failures but of its foreign policy and the wars it could not win. The economic ideas of Louis Bonaparte were no less sound than Roosevelt's New Deal. However, Napoleon could not find an alliance to oppose Bismarck in the German wars nor to protect the monarchy of Maximilian in Mexico from Lincoln and Seward. The Russians had already made their peace with Bismarck over the corpse

⁸ D'Agostino, *Marxism*, 43–45. The formula of Machiavellianism from below was later used in Mikhail Agursky, *The Third Rome: National Bolshevism in the USSR* (Boulder and London: Westview, 1987), 36–38. This is a translation of Agursky's *Ideologiia natsional bol'shevizma*.

of Poland in 1863. The British could not see advantage in opposing Bismarck, and were even led by Bismarck to think that France posed more of a threat. A few years after the French defeat, Britain outraged France by buying up the Khedive's shares in the Suez Canal. Even the United States developed a civil relationship with Russia during the American civil war and was permitted to buy Alaska as a result. French defeat, however, meant revolution and a desperate attempt to organise resistance to the German conqueror in the Paris Commune. This demonstrated that, despite the hopes of revolutionaries for another 1848, revolution in Europe was unlikely except in the case of national defeat in war. That would be shown with special clarity in 1917.

The Paris Commune, which Engels later called the first case of the dictatorship of the proletariat, went down to defeat. What were its lessons for the left? Whose ideas were vindicated by it? Did it illustrate anarchist ideas as Bakunin and his co-thinkers asserted? Did it prove that extra-parliamentary means were ultimately futile, as Marxists seemed to think? Who wanted the Paris Commune? Bakunin of course. But Marx fooled them all with his enthusiastic endorsement of the Commune in his pamphlet *The Civil War in France*. Marxism was rescued for Lenin to write its defence in *The State and Revolution* in 1917. Commenting on this, Lenin's contemporary, the anarchist G. P. Maksimov, remarked that, had Marx not endorsed the Commune, Marxism would have faded away 'in the remote byways' of the labour movement.⁹ Marx remained enough of an anarchist to make Lenin a Marxist revolutionary in 1917.

The Evolution of Social Democracy

As it left the Paris Commune behind, mainstream Social Democracy became a party of parliamentary advance for the trade unions in Germany, Britain, and other countries, right up to the point where war broke out in 1914, while anarchists and even some Social Democrats of the left maintained a criticism of the Social Democratic parliamentary path. Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks who made revolution in 1917 had not been critics of mainstream German Social Democracy. However they broke with their mentors over support for the war. They said that 'social patriotism' had been prepared for a generation by the 'opportunism' of its leaders, Karl Kautsky at their head. The logic of this argument was that the anarchists had been right in their criticism. Lenin suggested as much in various utterings. But Lenin himself was never an opponent of Social Democratic 'opportunism' before 1914. The German Social Democrats had never done him a bad turn. They had refused to intervene in the Russian dispute over Lenin's 'Jacobin' organisational ideas, despite the fact that Georgi Plekhanov, Pavel Akselrod, and others who eventually went with the Mensheviks had urged the International to rein Lenin in. For his part, Lenin supported Kautsky and the German leaders. He challenged one critic to find a single case where he had gone against Kautsky. There was no opposition between the two until Kautsky advised support for the war credits in 1914 and became, for Lenin, 'the renegade Kautsky'.

Between the Paris Commune and the world war, anarchists and Marxists did not share any political space. Marx and Engels continued to expect that Germany would rise among the powers and their idea with it. A victory for Germany was a victory for German Marxism.

The First International expelled the Bakuninists at its Hague Conference of 1872. When the Second International was formed in 1889, it was an international of Marxist Social Democratic

⁹ G. P. Maksimov, *The Guillotine at Work* (Chicago, 1940), 21; "Sotzializm, anarkhizm, i russkaia revoliutsiia," *Volna* (March–April–May, 1923), 19.

parties. It excluded the anarchists. Would things have been different if the anarchists and Social Democrats had been in the same international, as in 1864–1872? No doubt anarchists might have got a better hearing for some of their ideas. Even so, it is hard to imagine the Social Democrats encouraging and supporting the tactics of the Bakuninists as a permanent policy. And vice versa. In the 1890s, revolutionary syndicalism arose in France, agitating around economic strikes and the slogan of the general strike. French and Spanish anarchists, heirs of Bakunin and Proudhon, fell in with the trend as ‘anarcho-syndicalists’. The Marxists of the Second International were not going for this. Ignaz Auer, speaking for the German Social Democrats, said openly that ‘the general strike is general nonsense’.¹⁰ It was a chasm between two tactical slogans and also a chasm between France and Germany.

Intellectual leadership of the anarchist movement after Bakunin’s death in 1876 passed to Peter Kropotkin, from Bakunin’s anarchist collectivism to Kropotkin’s anarchist communism, according to the histories. Kropotkin wrote widely about an array of subjects.¹¹ His books in defence of the idea of mutual aid against Social Darwinism are still worth reading today. He took a more or less favourable view of *narodnichestvo* (populism) in Russia and wrote sympathetically about the movements to the people in which radical students attempted to go the countryside, into the areas along the Volga where the vast peasant jacqueries of Stenka Razin and Emelian Pugachëv had broken out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Narodniki* looked to these regions for the peasant war that would deliver Russia from the Tsar and instil an agrarian socialism based on the repartitional commune. They failed in their movements to the people but implanted themselves politically among the peasants so that, when the latter got the franchise in 1905, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, based on the ideas of the *narodnichestvo*, emerged as the party of the peasantry. Under normal conditions with a Western-style democracy in an agrarian country, this party would have had more than enough votes to rule Russia. But there were not to be any such normal conditions.

Kropotkin did not write much against Marxism, although he continued the anarchist perspectives of his predecessors. Kropotkinist theorists relied instead on the work of Kropotkin’s collaborator in British exile, Varlaam Cherkezov, who took the critique of Marxism to a new level. Marx and Engels, he said, had plagiarised *The Communist Manifesto* from the *Manifesto of Democracy* of Victor Considérant. Engels had lifted passages for his book of 1844, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, from a French book of 1840 by Eugène Buret.¹² Cherkezov asserted that Marxist economic theory was simplistic, unoriginal, and empirically mistaken. The Marxist expectation about the monopoly tendency in capital and the effect of competition winnowing out the weaker capitalists had been demonstrated to be wrong. Instead of the idea that one capitalist kills many, Cherkezov maintained that the number of property owners always and everywhere augments. This was Eduard Bernstein’s main economic idea in the revisionist controversy that engulfed the German Social Democracy at the turn of the century. The Social Democrats would not restrain Germany, thought Kropotkin and Cherkezov, as their doctrine teaches them that they are the inheritors of everything that the capitalist builds or, in this case, seizes.

¹⁰ Quoted in Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 61.

¹¹ Caroline Cahm, *Peter Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1873–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹² Varlaam Cherkezov, *Doktriny Marksizma: nauka-li eto?* (London, 1904), 4–7. *U kogo Marks i Engels spisal Komunisticheskii Manifest?* (London, 1904).

Could one say any more against Marxism than this? Well perhaps even a bit more. A Polish revolutionary, Jan Waclaw Machajski, disillusioned, like Bakunin, with Polish patriotism, concluded that all the existing revolutionary ideas, including Marxism, anarchism, and the rest, were designed, with their utopias, to pave the way for one new elite or another, under conditions that would perpetuate the wage slavery of the worker. Marxism, the most sophisticated doctrine, was the worst offender. It was the ideology, argued Machajski in his magnum opus, *Umstvennyi Rabochi* (the intellectual worker), not of the manual worker but of the intellectual worker, the constantly growing class that one saw on the streets of the biggest cities—professional people, white collar workers, managers, directors, wearing suits and neckties rather than overalls, neither meeting a payroll nor punching a time clock. Where did they fit in the struggle of classes? No doubt the capitalist thought of intellectual workers as expensive proletarians, perhaps reducible to the status of proletarians under certain conditions. They solidarised with the proletariat under the rubric of democracy and especially social democracy. But they had no interest in the emancipation of the workers from wage labour, only in the rationalisation of the economic system of capitalism in such a way that the workers might enjoy the benefits of a free press, trade union rights, and a voice in choosing their rulers in democratic elections. Yet, in countries where the workers had the vote, wage slavery proceeded as under the most absolute of monarchies. There was a distinct difference in social reward to the two classes, the educated and the uneducated, as a result of democracy. Education, thought Machajski, must therefore be seen as a kind of capital. Until the workers were able to seize this citadel by the ‘socialisation of knowledge’ which would give them the same education as the intellectual workers, all struggle for democracy would be a cruel joke.¹³

The social democracy, under Marxist parliamentary ideology, thus presented a formula for the perpetual enslavement of the working class, peacefully and legally marching through its election campaigns toward a regime which benefited only the intellectual workers. Marxism was the ideology of the intellectual worker, designed through a confidence trick to mobilise a proletarian constituency as its main support. The economic doctrine in Marx’s *Capital* presented in elaborate logic formulae demonstrating the impossibility, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, of a distribution of social product to the producers. There must always be a stock of capital put aside, presumably for future growth, but in fact, he argued, for the intellectual workers and their progeny, designated by them as national capital. It must be defended as a fundamental national interest. Patriotism, with its manifold deceptions, was to be applied to the realm of political economy. Machajski made an elaborate, almost impenetrable, argument for this proposition in the second part of *The Intellectual Worker*. Trotsky tells us that the manuscript made a powerful impression on the minds of the exiles in Siberia when he was there in 1900–1901. ‘It gave me a strong inoculation against anarchism, a theory bold in its verbal negations, but lifeless and cowardly in its practical conclusions’.¹⁴

When I first read Machajski for the substantial chapter on him in my dissertation, I was taken with the verbal negations, as were some other colleagues, Paul Avrich, who went on to devote his life to study of the history of anarchism, and Marshall Shatz, who later wrote a Machajski biography. We had been introduced to Machajski and advised at length by Max Nomad, who

¹³ J. W. Machajski, *Buzhuazjna rewolucyja a sprawa robotnicza* (Geneva, 1905), 4–5.

¹⁴ J. W. Machajski, *Umstvennyi rabochi* (Geneva, 1905); L. Trotsky, *My Life* (1930) (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), 129.

had been his disciple in Poland and had written a number of sprightly studies on leftist foibles, which he called utopian, self-delusional, and even deceptively self-interested. Intellectuals were apparently infected by an intense lust for power. Because of Nomad, Machajski had been well known to intellectuals in the 1930s, had influenced some academics in a small way, and may have encouraged James Burnham to write *The Managerial Revolution*. And perhaps this further inspired Milovan Djilas's 'New Class' and Mikhail Voslenskii's 'Nomenklatura'.¹⁵ Machajski offered a kind of key to an ideology of disillusionment. One could not fail to see the application to Soviet Russia, and in general to Communism in power, and here it seemed to offer another key. Or, better yet, why not call public employees of the modern state a 'new class' and see them as an enemy?

Perhaps one can see the allure, perhaps a dangerous allure, for the intellectual historian. Was Machajski such an eye-opener as he seemed in the early 1970s? Does the perspective of the uneducated Polish or Russian 'horny-handed' worker of the turn of the twentieth century offer such a brilliant insight into the very soul of bureaucracy? I have since concluded that Machajski was broadly right to view socialism generally as a system in which salaried intellectuals, which Machajski called the intelligentsia (giving the Russian term an economic definition), pretty much run things. Can one suppose modern society to be able to dispense with this class? Is the most damning indictment of Marxism the claim that it does not intend to distribute the GDP to the people equally? From the point of view of the Makhavist (Soviet pamphlets usually attacked him using a Russianised version of his name, Makhaisky or Makhaev), can one say that the state in Communism, for example, in China or Cuba, is really the instrument of the intelligentsia? When we talk about Communist state interests in a world of competing states, are they reducible to the interests of its officials?

Some of us wanted to make Machajski a hero of opposition to Bolshevism as a kind of 'intelligentsia counter-revolution'.¹⁶ But this was not accurate. Machajski was a critic of the social democracy but not really of Lenin's Bolshevism which he greeted as violent break for Marxists from the grip of the social democracy. The intelligentsia counter-revolution of which Machajski wrote was actually a strike against the Bolsheviks after they took power. Government employees withheld keys to offices and tried to bring the new Soviet government to its knees by refusing their services. The intelligentsia acted against the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks broke this strike quickly to the approval of Machajski, who had returned to Russia a few weeks before. Machajski urged that Soviet Power be supported despite all he might have said about Marxism. Not that the Bolsheviks had become anarchists, as many of the anarchists actually thought, but because they were true, he said, to the Communism of the *Communist Manifesto*, which had been diluted by decades of Social Democratic parliamentarism. That was pretty close to the argument that Lenin eventually came up with about the history of Social Democratic opportunism. According to this, as we have seen, Kautsky and the German Social Democratic leadership had suppressed the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. That was the presumed reason for its 'opportunism'. Lenin knew of Machajski's rendering and may indeed have been inspired by it. Bolshevism and

¹⁵ Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Marshall Shatz, *Jan Wacław Machajski: a Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and Socialism* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939); James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day, 1941); Bruno Rizzi, *La Bureaucratisation du monde* (Paris, 1939); Milovan Djilas, *New Class* (New York and London: Praeger, 1957); Mikhail Voslenskii, *Nomenklatura* (London: Overseas Publications, 1984).

¹⁶ Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 200.

Makhaevism ended up marching together. At any rate, Machajski worked faithfully in the Soviet State apparatus as an economist for a Soviet periodical until his death in 1926.

War and Mutiny

Machajski's reconciliation with Bolshevism was repeated in various ways by a large number of anarchist militants, some well known, such as William 'Bill' Shatov, Aleksandr Ge, Daniil Novomirsky, and Aleksandr Shapiro, some less so. I was unprepared for this when I first plunged into the boxes of anarchist correspondence at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. I fully expected anarchist reflexes about statism, Jacobinism, Marxism, all the forebodings of Bakunin and Kropotkin; instead I found a series of confused assessments about Bolshevik motives alongside the conviction that the enemies of the Bolsheviks were the enemies of the human race, enemies on whom the responsibility for all the sufferings of Bolshevik rule must ultimately be laid. The 1914–1918 war had apparently changed all the signs, and the revolution in Russia was being perceived by those who were in the thick of it, not as a vast social experiment, but as a revolt against the imperialist war.

I suppose this should not have been such a surprise. Even for those who chose to make war in 1914, the war came to consume all their other interests and perspectives. They had not supposed that war would produce such a profound change. They had expected it to be rather like the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 or the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, with bitter fighting and great loss of life, until finally one side caved in. This was the short war that was expected. The Long War that unfolded was different, a desperate fight for survival with every conceivable weapon, including the weapon of pacifism and revolution among the enemy powers. Thus did the Entente intelligence foment national revolution among the component states of the Habsburg empire. The Germans tried to assist Irish nationalists and Russian pacifist Bolsheviks. The war turned its belligerents into revolutionaries.

Kropotkin supported the Entente enthusiastically from the start and urged French and Russians to arms. This does not need a lot of explaining after all that he and his comrades had written about German militarism and its threat to republican France. Only the churlish could point out, as Trotsky did, that it meant going against everything Kropotkin had written for fifty years. On the other side of the 'chasm' between anarchism and social democracy, Georgii Plekhanov argued for the Entente in almost identical terms, except that he was able to invoke Marxist precedence. Marxists, he insisted, were not pacifists. In the Franco-Prussian war, Marx had been unhappy with the wavering of his German followers toward a pacifist position. Wars had consequences for the proletariat and one had to base political action on this. So, as Marx had in effect supported German nationalism against French Bonapartism in 1870–1871, Plekhanov urged that the Russian worker support the Tsar's Russia because of the Franco-Russian alliance.

It is not difficult to understand why these militants of the left should fear the victory of German militarism.¹⁷ Difficult to square with their old ideas, but not difficult to understand. Kropotkin was temporarily forsaking the struggle against the state. Plekhanov, on the other

¹⁷ Matthew S. Adams and Ruth Kinna, 'Introduction' to Adams and Kinna (Eds), *Anarchism, 1914–18: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism, and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 1–26; F. L. Carsten, *War against War: British and German Radical Movements in the First World War* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

hand, was rigidly adhering to the principle that war is war. But neither of them could convince the younger generation, who, closer to the age of those who would have to fight, treated the war as something *sui generis*. In the Spring of 1915, at about the time when the powers were running out of ammunition and calling upon their governments to prepare more of it for a long war, Errico Malatesta urged the younger anarchists to break with Kropotkin's war line. He and the signatories of his International Anarchist Manifesto on the War, issued in March 1915, Aleksandr Berkman, Emma Goldman, Domela Nieuwenhuis, Iuda Grossman-Roshchin, Aleksandr Shapiro, Bill Shatov, and others, issued a call for the workers of the belligerent countries to turn the war into a civil war. That is more or less the same call that was issued by Lenin and the Zimmerwald left.

Bolshevism was bound therefore to attract the attention of Ludendorff and the German General Staff, in much the same way that Mussolini's pro-war position was bound to attract the attention of the French. Both powers provided support to what they thought and hoped were new clients. The French got a man with a key influence on Italian opinion whom they supplied with funds for a daily paper. The Germans helped send Lenin to Russia in the hope that his party might somehow take Russia out of the war. It was as easy for their opponents to claim that Mussolini was bought with French gold as to say that Lenin was a German agent. Those who led the powers quickly came to understand that only men of the left could lead the troops.

The desperation of the Long War made revolution possible. Russia scholars of my generation seemed to realise this as they took note of the radicalisation of the workers and peasants in the war years. They defended the spontaneity of the Russian revolution against rightist historians who clung to the thesis of an October coup against the popular will. They also said that the radicalisation was proceeding before the war. The social crisis of the Tsarist regime was such, they came to think, that a revolution would have resulted, war or no war. It is easy to see the vast crisis, but more difficult to see how the Tsarist regime could have been overthrown in peacetime. The war, on the other hand, armed the working class and much of the peasantry and failed to take them to victory. A fatal conjuncture. Just as the workers had built the Saint Petersburg Soviet of Workers Deputies in 1905, they built the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' deputies in 1917. The fall of the Tsar came out of the defeat of the war effort. The proletariat of the capital created an institution which already had in its very nature distinctly semi-governmental pretensions and drew into it a huge body of armed men.

Anarchists correctly saw the soviet as an institution around which to reorient all their conceptions about social organisation. Whereas trade unions now seemed to lead naturally to parliaments—this was a reproach commonly aimed at anarcho-syndicalists prior to the war—a soviet, a workers' council, now seemed to be the ideal instrument to lead the workers to the revolution, or rather the completion of the revolution that had overthrown the Tsar. The trade union was eclipsed by the factory committee, and parliament was eclipsed by the soviet. It was a new and dynamic idea for anarchism to embrace, especially of those disappointed in the role of pre-war anarchism and its patriotic betrayals.

The Bolsheviks called for 'All Power to the Soviets' after Lenin fought for the slogan in April 1917. They also combined to vote with anarchists for workers control, instead of the Menshevik line for state control of industry, at a conference of factory committees. Were the Bolsheviks really departing from social democracy and going over to anarchist ideas? One can discuss this into the night, and consider all the implications of the wavering among the anarchists on the dictatorship of the proletariat. Some anarchists, such as Aleksandr Shapiro, pronounced themselves in favour

of a 'transitional dictatorship of labour'. This whole discussion would seem, however, to miss the essential point: the war. Bolsheviks were the only party in the Petrograd Soviet that was steadfastly opposed to the war and willing to take power in order to make a separate peace with Germany and Austria. Lenin's people proclaimed this every day to all who would listen. This was the main reason that they were able to bid for power. Anarchists who were also against the war had to make common cause. The only way for Kerensky to save the regime and to hope for some kind of democracy in the future, an enormous stretch to be sure, was to win the war. Kerensky was almost driven out of power when the offensive of June–July, 'the Kerensky offensive', failed as had the others before it. He was hanging on as a war leader as it was thought only a socialist and a man of the left could get the soldiers to fight.

Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks could see the logic. As Lenin had provided a theory to oppose the war as a Marxist in his essay of 1916, *Imperialism*, he wrote *The State and Revolution* in the summer of 1917 to justify in theory the taking of power. He called for a regime like the Paris Commune. That recalled for anarchists the essential agreement between Marx and Bakunin on the Paris Commune. It left open once again the possibility that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were breaking with social democracy. Lenin allowed them to think exactly that. He succeeded because it was true. But where was the essential break, the clinching moment for the 'conversion' of Lenin to anarchism? Once again, the historians invite us to consider all the ramifications of the encounter of two historically opposed ideologies. However, the point was the war. Social Democracy was committed to the cause of the Entente. That was the issue of life and death, they thought, for the future of democracy and progress for humanity. Kerensky had to get the troops to fight. And, they ultimately decided, if Kerensky could not do it, someone else must.

At the end of the summer, at a Democratic Conference, all the leading lights of the patriotic effort, including Kropotkin himself, made a desperate, plaintive appeal to put some life into the war effort. Out of this conference came the conviction that it was only because of the Soviet that the troops could not be made to fight. The war was being lost in the rear. It was necessary to close the Soviet, arrest its remaining leaders (Lenin was already in hiding, and Trotsky under arrest). The man for the job was General Lavr Kornilov. There followed Kornilov's attempt to take power, first alongside Kerensky, then against Kerensky. Resisting Kornilov, Kerensky freed the imprisoned Bolsheviks and allowed them to arm the Red Guard. After Kornilov was stopped, it was only a short step for the Bolsheviks to the winning of power, legitimised by majorities in the Soviet and 126 other soviets. Could Kornilov's military dictatorship have got the soldiers to fight? Perhaps for a while, but only if it possessed power such as no regime, even the fascist regimes of Mussolini in Italy or Primo Rivera in Spain, were to be able to exercise. Would this have been a long-run solution for Russia? Could such a regime have collectivised agriculture, industrialised the country, and defeated Hitler?

It was fear of a Kornilov military dictatorship that caused the Petrograd Soviet and the other soviets to rally around Bolshevism. Without this majority position in the Soviet Power Lenin and Trotsky could scarcely have thought about arresting the Kerensky government. Kornilov might have made himself the first fascist dictator in Europe and a model for another country continuing the war effort against popular pacifistic protest. This was the mortal threat he posed to all the garrison and the Soviet. Thinking about this, the German parliamentarian and council

communist Otto Rühle called the October events that brought the Bolsheviks to power ‘a pacifist putsch’,¹⁸

The first decrees said nothing about the Bolshevik party but declared a series of measures in the name of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. The very first was the decree on peace in the name of which negotiations were begun with Germany and Austria. This met with the approval of many, but not all, of the anarchist leaders. There were many who, like Kropotkin, considered a separate peace treason to the French and a capitulation to Germany—which, of course, it was. Yet the separate peace, which materialised as the peace of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, was at bottom the reason for the revolution in Russia.

The onerous peace gave up Russian control over the Baltic provinces, the Ukraine, and the Caucasus. It gave a certain credibility to the charge that the Bolsheviks were German agents. Yet to defend it and get Russia out of the war, the anarchists and Bolsheviks closed the Constituent Assembly after it had sat for one day. The elections to this body had been considered the only real legitimisation of power by groups across the spectrum—pro-war or anti-war, including the Bolsheviks. Returns showed a Socialist Revolutionary plurality of around 40% and a 25% city vote for the Bolsheviks. The pro-war Mensheviks were destroyed as a party. Who knows how this would have turned out if the voting lists had reflected the split in the ranks of the SRs? The left SRs, who had just broken with the SR party and the war effort, had essentially embraced the Bolshevik programme on the land and the peace. Lenin cited this fact but did not call for a new poll.

Finally the anarchists of the Assembly’s guard, led by Anatoli Zhelezniakov, took the initiative and closed it after one day—thus ended the only experiment of Soviet Russia, at least until the Gorbachev years, with Western-style parliamentary democracy. But the real point was that the Assembly with its pro-war SR leadership had emphatically declared that under no circumstances could the negotiations that had been opened by the Bolsheviks be allowed to result in a separate peace. The leaders of the Constituent Assembly, if they were to continue the fight, would have had to do what Kornilov had already tried to do, close down the Soviet. The anarchists and the Bolsheviks, in closing the Constituent Assembly, were continuing their fight against Kornilov, a fight to get Russia out of the war.

Many historians of the Russian revolution do not usually stress the war as much as the radical programmes of the Bolsheviks. In their accounts, it often seems odd that the Russian masses could have become so radicalised so fast by a series of extreme slogans. This view fits oddly with the notion that the Bolsheviks never really had popular support and, in some cases, also accords with the idea that the Bolsheviks took power by a coup which, of course, they did. That it was a coup backed by the Soviet Power seems a troublesome footnote. When one considers the impact of the mutiny and the truly desperate attempts to get the troops to fight, their radicalisation does not seem so odd. But even if one goes this far with the mutiny thesis, it becomes even more astounding that the mutinous troops could subsequently be got to fight to defend the revolutionary regime.

But that is what happened. No sooner had the pacifist putsch unfolded than it faced armed opposition by the allied powers and the Whites in their forlorn effort to get Russia back in the fight. And Trotsky proved capable of raising a Red Army to take them on in the Urals. In the

¹⁸ Otto Rühle, “Moscow and Us,” *Die Aktion*, 18 September 1920, trans. John Gray. Libcom.org/library/Moscow-us-Otto-ruhle.

Ukraine, surrendered to the Germans by Brest-Litovsk, Nestor Makhno raised his own division-sized army to deny a large section of the south to German forces. Makhno did this as an anarchist, drawing to his side some of the most prominent of the anarchist intellectuals. He held off the Germans, to Lenin's congratulations, and after the armistice that ended the war, also managed to hold off the French-supported Whites. Fighting for the revolution and the exit of Russia from the war he was never defeated. After the war, his Bolshevik allies even offered him a chance to stay with them by ordering his army away from its home base. Makhno could see that this would have meant subordinating his fight for freedom to the national and statist leadership of the Soviet Power.

The break of Bolshevism with Makhno's movement thus occurred at a moment of victory for the 'coalition' that had somehow kept the anarchists and the Bolsheviks in the same column fighting for revolution and peace. The victory over the Whites and the Allied intervention brought home to the Soviet leaders that their relationship with the peasants was only good for the period of the civil war and intervention and the regime of War Communism. In peace, the peasants could not be controlled as in war against the counter-revolution, unless one supposed that Russian agriculture could be organised permanently by troops carrying out compulsory grain requisitions. This idea, which came to fruition in the collectivisation a decade later, could not be taken seriously in the aftermath of war.

As peace broke out, peasants all over Russia strained against the demands of the War Communist regime as did Makhno's peasants in the southern Ukraine. South of Moscow, the Tambov revolt went on for months and sent its inchoate but powerful message to the peasants and ex-peasants serving in the Soviet armed forces. This affected the ex-peasants drawn into the cities by the war. The population of Petrograd rose up in a general strike against the suppression of the black market in food, and the ex-peasant city workers drew the sympathy of the sailors of the Kronstadt garrison in the Gulf of Finland. The rising of the peasants against War Communism turned into the Kronstadt revolt against Soviet power. At least, that was how the Russian anarchists viewed the struggle for 'soviets without Communists'.

In the name of Soviet Power, the Bolsheviks crushed the Kronstadt revolt as they suppressed Makhno's army. From the standpoint of some prominent anarchists, but not all anarchists, this was the great defeat of the Russian revolution that came at the very moment of its great victory. Could it have been any different with state power? Would the Bolsheviks cede power to agrarian Russia, a federative polity without any state compulsion, and without any state to defend its borders against other states in a big bad world? In discussing the cause of anarchism in the Russian revolution have we been assuming too much for the sake of our sympathy for these lovers of freedom? Was it all not impossible from the beginning? Who says it was possible? Should they not have thought it through and forgotten the whole thing? Would the anarchists not have done better as Hamlets paralysed by reasoning and frozen into inaction? Or was it their very illusions that made possible the fascinating story that we are here pondering for posterity?

We have to bear in mind that it is not a tragic story, although the story of anarchism might be considered a story of deep tragedy. The larger story ends somehow a quarter century later in the defeat of Hitler together with the United States in what is perhaps the latter's most progressive and dynamic moment. A story full of irony, but not a tragedy.

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