

Interpreting Marx's Theory of the State and Opposition to Anarchism

(Revised Edition)

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“... no state, howsoever democratic its forms, not even the reddest political republic... is capable of giving the people what they need: the free organisation of their own interests from below upward...”

– Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 24

“[With the abolition of classes] the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of the producers under the yoke of the numerically small exploiting minority, disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions. [The anarchists] put matters the other way round...”

– Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Fictitious Splits in the International*, p. 741¹

Marxism, Anarchism, and the State

The purpose of this pamphlet is to reassess the views of Karl Marx, his close partner Friedrich Engels, and their anarchist contemporaries on the crucial question of ‘*the State*’.² Specifically, I contend that dominant interpretations of Marx have unsatisfactorily addressed his varied and contradictory analysis of the State, its role (if any) in the construction of a socialist society, and the ways in which this has both overlapped and come into conflict with the anarchist view.

My analysis is divided into three parts: In **Section I**, I discuss the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto* and other earlier manuscripts, arguing that it is in this material³ that we find the clearest indication of a centralised, statist praxis.⁴ **Section II** concerns the Marx of the International Workingmen’s Association,⁵ both as an organiser and theorist. Close readings of *The Civil War in France*, and other writings concerning the Paris Commune, demonstrate contradictory shifts in his thought which complicate both the ‘Orthodox’ and ‘Libertarian’⁶ interpretations of this period. I contend that Marxists have failed to consider the context of Marx’s practical efforts at centralisation within the International, which allow us to better understand ambiguities in

¹ As cited within Marx, K., Engels, F., & Lenin, V.I. (ed. Kolpinsky, N. Y.). 1972. *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Progress Publishers: Moscow.

² Primarily Mikhail Bakunin, who (though not the first to call himself an anarchist) is widely considered to be the first theorist of anarchism as a fully developed tendency and mass movement. He was the intellectual leader of the libertarian opposition to Marx’s faction within the International Workingmen’s Association.

³ Along with Engels’ consistently less sophisticated analysis. See *note 18* for further comments.

⁴ Marx and Engels’ earlier work, particularly when selectively quoted, have been used to justify the behaviour of authoritarian currents that developed within the movement – i.e., the Leninist and post-Leninist variations. Interestingly, Lenin’s most famous work on the State, *The State and Revolution* (1917) is also his most libertarian, and essentially reproduces the obscurantist, threefold use of the term ‘State’ explored in Section III of this essay. He, likewise, takes advantage of the resulting confusion to the same ends.

⁵ Henceforth referred to as either the ‘First International’ or ‘International.’

⁶ The word ‘libertarian’ is used throughout this essay in its original form. Though now associated in some countries (most obviously, the United States) with ‘laissez-faire’ capitalism, this is a recent distortion (and an intentional one). Libertarianism historically indicated a general philosophical tendency toward free action. The first political use of the term was by the anarchist communist Joseph Dejacque in 1857. From that point on it became synonymous with the word anarchist. This usage has been retained throughout much of the world, though with the development of libertarian currents within Marxism it has since become an umbrella term for all anti-state socialists. Classical libertarians contend that the right-wing appropriation is actually authoritarian, given its support for the inherently hierarchical and exploitative social relations produced by capitalism. The ‘libertarian’ reading of Marx referred to here is the one which understands Marx as rejecting State power in the sense of taking power within a government.

his theoretical work. Finally, in **Section III**, the incoherent nature of Marx's final analysis is compared with the anarchist position. I argue that Marx and Engels developed an ever-shifting conception of the State, which – whether cynically, or out of mere ignorance – both they and their followers have long used to misrepresent and discredit the major alternative to their theoretical framework and movement.

I. The Young Marx: From the Critique of Hegel to the Transitional State

Though it remained unpublished until 1932, Engels pointed to the manuscripts which constitute the basis for *The German Ideology* (1845) as the point of departure for understanding Marx's mature theory of the State.⁷ Prior to 1845, the young Marx and Engels had tended to use more radical rhetoric concerning the need for the State's 'abolition.' Both had read and admired the work of the liberal-republican radical William Godwin, both for 'developing the theory of exploitation in England'⁸ and taking the underlying principles of Republicanism "to its legitimate conclusions" of opposing "the very essence of the state itself".⁹

The most developed example of Marx's youthful anti-statism can be found in the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* (1843), which contains an extended deconstruction of both constitutional monarchy and bourgeois government.¹⁰ In it Marx appears to reject any notion of 'representation' in favour of mandated delegates:

The separation of the political state from civil society appears as the separation of the deputies from their mandators. Society delegates only elements from itself to its political mode of being... delegates of civil society form a society which is not linked with those who commission them by the form of the "instruction," the mandate. Formally they are commissioned, but once they are actually commissioned they are no longer mandatories. They are supposed to be delegates, and they are not.¹¹

This constitutes a radical break with the state-form of organisation and is one of only two cases where Marx places any emphasis on the delegate-representative distinction. He would not express these kinds of sentiments again until his ambiguous comments on the Paris Commune nearly three decades later. Similarly, the *Critique* also features an attack on the self-reproducing character of bureaucratic organisation, which shares far more in common with *The Civil War in France* than the rest of Marx's work:

⁷ Both Hal Draper and N.Y. Kolpinsky endorse the view that Engels is referring to the manuscripts of *The German Ideology*. See, *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p.350fn107 and Draper, H. 1970. 'The Death of the State in Marx and Engels'. *Socialist Register: Volume 7: 281-307*. p. 293

⁸ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 5: Marx and Engels, 1845-47*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 412

⁹ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 3: Karl Marx, March 1843-August 1844*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 486

¹⁰ This manuscript is sometimes published as *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. The draft was, in reality, untitled, and Marx's critique is limited to the section concerning Hegel's 'Doctrine of the State'.

¹¹ *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 3*. Ibid. p. 123

The bureaucracy is the ‘state formalism’ of civil society. It is ... the ‘state power’ in the form of a corporation, i.e., of a *particular, self-contained* society within the state... The bureaucracy appears to itself as the ultimate purpose of the state. As the bureaucracy converts its ‘formal’ purposes into its content, it comes into conflict with ‘real’ purposes at every point. It is therefore compelled to pass off form as content... The bureaucracy is a magic circle from which no one can escape... As for the individual bureaucrat, the purpose of the state becomes his private purpose, a *hunt for promotion, careerism*... his existence is the existence of his office.¹²

It is easy to see how the young Marx and Engels associated their ideas at this time with the demand to ‘abolish the State’. Engels, however, later dismissed this as “boyhood” philosophy — Marxism, he claimed, had matured beyond such things, whereas anarchism had not.¹³

The manuscripts which make up *The German Ideology* likewise locate the State’s origins in “the emancipation of private property from the community,” which is to say, the separation of society into classes.¹⁴ This act renders the State as a concrete apparatus of government; a “separate entity, alongside and outside civil society,” serving as “nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeois are compelled to adopt, both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests.” *The German Ideology* repeatedly refers to ‘the State’ as such a governmental model of social organisation, wherein “all common institutions... are given a political form” for the purposes of maintaining existing property relations.¹⁵ Therefore, Marx and Engels concluded that,

[Whereas] previous revolutions within the framework of [class-society] were bound to lead to new political institutions;¹⁶ it likewise follows that the communist revolution, which [abolishes class-society], ultimately abolishes political institutions.¹⁷

This formula, to which the word “ultimately” is crucial, set the foundations for the Marxist view of the State’s role in social revolution and continues to inform most contemporary interpretations. The approach was neatly summarised by Engels in an article for *Der Sozialdemokrat* (1883) following Marx’s death (initiating the cultivation of an ‘Orthodox Marxism’).¹⁸ Citing both

¹² Marx, K. 1992. *Early Writings*. Penguin Classics. pp. 106-108

¹³ Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 48

¹⁴ Here Marx and Engels follow in the footsteps of many radicals before them. Significant credit for the popularisation of the idea is owed to Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

¹⁵ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 5: Marx and Engels 1845–47*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 90

¹⁶ i.e., New manifestations of the State.

¹⁷ i.e., The State itself. All quotes, Ibid. p. 380

¹⁸ Following Marx’s death, Engels and Karl Kautsky continued to edit and publish his work. Whether intentionally or otherwise, the material they compiled, published, and edited, was used to give weight to their own respective views. Kautsky’s interpretation of Marxist theory, influenced by Engels presentation of the original documents, would eventually become the standard one. Some have suggested that Engels misrepresented Marx, and that there is a fundamental split between the two thinkers. Though a close reading does indicate some differences between them, the split does not appear to be one which is fundamental, but rather a case of Engels writing with greater frequency and clarity on subjects where Marx was particularly weak as a theorist. It is worth quoting the anarchist Wayne Price on this issue: “There are those, particularly among libertarian Marxists, who criticize Engels as the first of the “post-Marx Marxists” who led the Marxist movement in the wrong direction. Rather than criticize Marx for things about the historical Marxist movement which they dislike, they blame Engels. They claim to understand Marx better than did his long-time

the manuscripts which make up *The German Ideology* and the publicly available *Communist Manifesto* (1848), he identified their *shared* position as one which holds that the abolition of the State cannot be accomplished *during* the process of social revolution itself. Instead,

the proletariat class will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the State and with this aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society... without which the whole victory must end in a defeat and in a massacre of the working class like that after the Paris Commune.¹⁹

This is due to the fact that,

... after the victory of the Proletariat, the only organisation the victorious working class finds ready-made for use is that of the State. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the victorious working class can exert its newly conquered power...²⁰

This clear, statist analysis appears to be consistent with the program proposed in the *Manifesto*, specifically *Section II* and its policy platform of progressive taxation, universal social services, the abolition of inheritance, the formation of “industrial armies,” the ‘necessary’ development of productive forces, and the gradual centralisation of all means of production “in the hands of the State.” This is, the authors declare, merely “the first step in the revolution,” wherein “the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.”²¹

However, alongside this call by the *Manifesto* to ‘win the battle of democracy’ a contradictory idea begins to emerge. Having in *The German Ideology* also referred to ‘the State’ as “the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests,” Marx and Engels now define their ‘revolutionary state’ as a *condition* (one could say, a ‘state’ of affairs) in which the proletariat has succeeded in reconstituting itself as ‘the new ruling class.’²²

In the nineteenth century it was not uncommon to use the word ‘State’ as a synonym for ‘society’. This is why, in the earliest years of the anarchist movement, one could even find anarchists calling for an ‘anarchist state’. Mikhail Bakunin’s *Program of the International Brotherhood* (1868), for instance, rejects the use of the State in revolution, only to call for a “new revolutionary State, organized from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation”.²³ Realising the confusion this could cause the practice was quickly dropped.²⁴

political partner and dearest friend! If true, this should raise questions about Marx; how come he could not explain his ideas even to Engels?... [For instance,] Marx is known to have read over Anti-Duhring and discussed all of it with Engels before its publication. Marx contributed a chapter to it – which he would hardly have done if he disagreed with major parts of it.” - Price, W. 2012. *Marx’s Economics for Anarchists*. Zabalaza Books: Johannesburg. pp. 50–51

¹⁹ Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 172

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 6: Marx and Engels 1845–48*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. pp. 497–506

²² *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 6*. Ibid. p. 504

²³ Bakunin, M. (ed. Lehning, A.) 1973. *Mikhail Bakunin: Selected Writings*. Jonathan Cape: London. p. 172

²⁴ The foremost anarchist communist theorist, Peter Kropotkin, noted as late as 1896 that “There is, as is well-known, the German school [associated with Marx and state socialism more generally] which likes to confuse the State with Society.” - Kropotkin, P. 2018. *Modern Science and Anarchy*. AK Press: Chico, Oakland, Edinburgh, & Baltimore. p. 234

But Marx's idea of the revolutionary State as 'proletarian rule' goes beyond equating the State with society. Instead, it suggests a new theory of the State; one which defines it as an *act* based on its *abstract function* for the exploiting class — i.e., the repression of one class by another, or, in other words, the perpetuation of class rule. This idea of the State is clearly not relevant to the reforms proposed in *Section II* of the *Manifesto*, or any of Marx and Engels' other vague and confused attempts to describe their 'transitional form' of workers' power. Contrary to their many attempts to pretend otherwise, it does not follow that the rejection of the kind of government called for by the *Manifesto* implies a rejection of 'proletarian rule'. Marx and Engels would, nevertheless, continue to conflate the two concepts in order to defend their theory of a transitory revolutionary government. One such example is the speech entitled *Indifference to Politics* (1873), wherein Marx used the confusion around these concepts to criticise his anarchist opponents:

If the political struggle of the working class assumes violent forms, if the workers substitute their revolutionary dictatorship for the dictatorship of the bourgeois class... to satisfy their own base everyday needs and crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie, instead of laying down arms and abolishing the State they are giving it a revolutionary and transient form.²⁵

Abolishing the State is therefore conflated with rejecting the 'violent form' of 'proletarian rule' because Marx has decided that his new definition is equally valid. For Marx, the proletariat 'raised to the position of the ruling class' is *simultaneously* both "a vast association of the whole nation" and a "public power," which — until the final abolition of class distinctions — *maintains* its "political character."²⁶

Similar contradictions can be seen in Marx's description of the 'state machinery' in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). Here the State is an alienated, centralising apparatus of "governmental power," defined by the development of infrastructure and public institutions, as well as the expropriation and management of property relations. Notably, however, Marx laments that all previous revolutions had "perfected this machine instead of breaking it," with the respective parties having "contended in turn for domination regard[ing] the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor."²⁷

Further complicating this already convoluted picture is the fact that, following the experience of the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels essentially disowned the prescriptions outlined in *Section II* of the *Manifesto*. In a Preface to the 1872 German Edition, they claim that these passages "would, in many respects, be very differently worded today" given the lessons provided by successive revolutionary experiments and the further development of productive forces.²⁸ Though this joint declaration begs the question as to why Engels would continue to cite *Section II's* analysis of the State,²⁹ it, nevertheless, appears to constitute an important break by Marx with those who continue to draw from the *Manifesto's* program and underlying theoretical logic.

²⁵ Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 95

²⁶ Marx and Engels *Collected Works*, Volume 6. Ibid. p. 505

²⁷ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 11: Marx and Engels 1851–53*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 186

²⁸ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 23: Marx and Engels 1871–74*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. pp. 174–175

²⁹ Engels specifically refers to *Section II* as descriptive of his and (the recently deceased) Marx's view. See, Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 172

II. The Mature Marx: From the Commune to the Critique of Anarchism

What, then, were the lessons of the Paris Commune – and how did they influence the development of Marxism? The *Manifesto's* reflective 1872 Preface has Marx reiterate one of his most famous lines from *The Civil War in France* (1871), stating that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.”³⁰ Not only is this distinct from previous appeals to the pursuit of political power (whether it be via electoral or insurrectionary means), it explicitly contradicts Engels' *post-Commune* assertion regarding the necessity of wielding the State as “ready-made” machinery, given it is the ‘*only* instrument available to workers.’ The famous slogan is also at odds with Marx's suggestion that, in certain countries, parliamentary means may be sufficient to establish communism, as well as his ongoing urging of workers organisations to compete in elections. Following Bakunin's gerrymandered expulsion from the International in 1872, Marx delivered a short speech on these issues, warning workers to reject the revolutionary ideas of abstentionist anarchists:

A group had formed in our midst advocating the workers' abstention from politics... The worker will some day have to win political supremacy in order to organise labour along new lines; he will have to defeat the old policy supporting old institutions, under penalty... of never seeing their kingdom on earth... we do not deny that there are countries [such as America, England, and perhaps Holland] where the working people may achieve their goal by peaceful means... we must also recognize that in most of the continental countries it is force that will have to be the lever of our revolutions...³¹

It is ironic that Marx, in confronting anarchism, suggested that it was the anarchists who put any hope in a revolution without force. Though Proudhon (who was more of a *proto*-anarchist than its genuine founder) could be accused of ‘indifference to politics’ in this sense, it is simply not true of the anarchist movement which followed. Bakunin and his admirers expressed clear support for direct action in the form of strikes and insurrection as a means of extracting reforms and preparing for revolution. Marx's frustration over anarchist ‘indifference to political struggle’ can therefore only be understood in terms of his opposition to parliamentary abstentionism and workers' power via councils, rather than the State. Indeed, Marx and Engels worked tirelessly to change the rules of the International, so that previously autonomous sections would be forced to form political parties, compete in elections, and take seats in parliament. This, they argued, was the ends of ‘political power’ to which the Internationals efforts should be ‘subordinated.’³²

Still, Marx's analysis of the Paris insurrection appears to break with all of this. He exalts the worker's apparent substitution of both the standing army and police with “the armed people,” as

³⁰ Ibid. p. 175. For the original usage see, Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 22: Marx and Engels 1870–71*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 328

³¹ Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. pp. 84–85

³² For two of the best historical accounts of these debates and events, see Graham, R. 2015. *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It: The First International and the Origins of the Anarchist Movement*. AK Press: Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore. as well as Eckhardt, W. 2016. *The First Socialist Schism: Bakunin Vs. Marx in the International Workingmen's Association*. PM Press: Oakland.

well as the replacement of traditional constitutional government (legislatures, executives, judiciaries, etc.) with a single democratic assembly, comprised of representatives subject to immediate recall. He praises the implementation of a “workman’s wage” for all elected officials (now to include those carrying out judicial functions), the elimination of church authority, the creation of an autonomous educational system, and the seizing of means of production by various workers associations.³³ Most of all, Marx emphasises the radicalism of the Communards’ vision of the revolutions future development:

common affairs [would be administered] by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents.³⁴

Here we have Marx — the great admirer of centralisation — returning to the ideas of mandated delegation and federalism, seemingly with praise. Notably, the unpublished drafts of *The Civil War in France* go even further in their libertarian rhetoric. In the second draft, Marx refers to the State as,

That huge governmental machinery, entailing like a boa constrictor the real social body in the ubiquitous meshes of a standing army, a hierarchical bureaucracy, an obedient police, clergy and a servile magistrature.³⁵

Furthermore, he claims that,

the proletariat cannot, as the ruling classes and their different rival factions have done in the successive hours of their triumph, simply lay hold of the existent state body and wield this ready-made agency for their own purpose... The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation.³⁶

It is worth highlighting that the final sentence here is remarkably similar to a comment made by Bakunin in his critique of Marx (and state socialism more generally) in *Statism and Anarchy* (1873):

They say that this state yoke, this dictatorship, is a necessary transitional device for achieving the total liberation of the people: anarchy, or freedom, is the goal, and the state, or dictatorship, the means. Thus, for the masses to be liberated they must first be enslaved.³⁷

³³ As Graham notes, the most radical Communards sought to make this the basis of revolutionary self-organisation and constituted a ‘mutualist and proto-syndicalist’ tendency, influenced by the work of Proudhon (and to a lesser extent Bakunin). – *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*. Ibid. p. 153

³⁴ *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 22*. Ibid. pp. 331–332

³⁵ *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 22*. Ibid. p. 533

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Bakunin, M. 1990. *Statism and Anarchy*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. p. 179

What are we to make of these convergences? Given that Marx had not renounced his call to seize state power, his admiration for the Paris Commune's most radical aspirations (and apparent condemnation of those features typically understood to define the State) implies a mere problem of semantics. In the libertarian reading of Marx, 'the State' now seemingly referred *exclusively* to 'the proletariat raising itself to the position of the ruling class' – i.e., the *act* of revolution itself.

The Civil War in France was, in fact, interpreted this way by many readers, including Bakunin, who considered it a cynical manoeuvre. In an 1872 letter to the Editorial Board of *La Liberte*, he wrote:

[The Commune's] general effect was so striking that the Marxists themselves, who saw all their ideas upset by the uprising, found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went even further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose were their own, in face of the simplest logic and their own true sentiments. This was a truly farcical change of costume, but they were bound to make it, for fear of being overtaken and left behind in the wave of feeling which the rising produced throughout the world.³⁸

To be sure, though Bakunin also praised its radical aspirations, he recognised that the Commune had fallen short of the anarchist concept of revolution.³⁹ Indeed, it should be clarified here that many of the aspects of the revolution highlighted by Marx were not actually realised within the Commune. Marx wrote his address with limited information about the realities of the uprising. The more far-reaching measures, such as its radical federalism, the use of recallable mandated delegates, the abolition of police, etc., reflected only the *proposals* of the most radical Communards – the followers of Proudhon and the collectivist anarchists.

In a 1929 article for *Die Aktion*, the German theorist Karl Korsch brought this uncomfortable fact to the attention of his fellow Marxists, and endorsed Bakunin's assessment that it represented a radical reversal in Marx's rhetoric:

In fact, if we analyze more exactly the political program and goals to be attained as proposed by the two founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, not only in the time before the Paris Commune insurrection, but also afterwards, the assertion cannot be maintained that the form of proletarian dictatorship realized by the Paris

³⁸ Mikhail Bakunin: *Selected Writings*. Ibid. p. 261

³⁹ As Kropotkin writes in *The Paris Commune* (published in three parts, in 1880, 1881, and 1882), later published as a chapter in *Words of a Rebel* (1885): "The Commune of 1871 could be nothing but a first attempt. Beginning at the close of a great war, hemmed in between two armies ready to join hands and crush the people, it dared not unhesitatingly set forth upon the path of economic revolution. It neither boldly declared itself socialist nor proceeded to the expropriation of capital nor the organization of labour. It did not even take stock of the general resources of the city. Neither did it break with the tradition of the state, of representative government, and it did not seek to effect within the Commune that organization from the simple to the complex which it inaugurated without, by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the communes... The people sent their devoted sons to the town hall. There, immobilised in the midst of paperwork, forced to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to act among the people, forced to discuss when it was necessary to act, to compromise when no compromise was the best policy, and, finally, losing the inspiration which only comes from continual contact with the masses, they found themselves reduced to impotence. Paralyzed by their removal from the revolutionary source, the people, they themselves paralyzed the popular initiative." - Kropotkin, P. (ed. McKay, I.) 2014. *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology*. AK Press: Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore. pp. 441-446. Slight adjustments have been made in this translation to include additional wording from the *Freedom Pamphlets* edition.

Commune of 1871 would in any particular sense be in unison with those political theories. Indeed, Marx's great opponent in the First International, Mikhail Bakunin, had on this point the historical truth on his side when he sarcastically commented on Marx's having annexed the Paris Commune retrospectively... The revolutionary ideas of the Paris communardes of 1871 are partly derived from the federalistic program of Bakunin and Proudhon, partly from the circle of ideas of the revolutionary Jacobins surviving in Blanquism, and only to a very small degree in Marxism.⁴⁰

Despite this, those making the case for his libertarian credentials routinely cite passages from *The Civil War* as indicative of a general theoretical shift in Marx's analysis of the State. In fact, few other texts are ever referenced by the Libertarian Marxists on the question of revolutionary strategy. Other deviations from Orthodox Marxism rely on material which remained hidden away in notebooks, if not actively suppressed by the leading figures of the Marxist movement.⁴¹

As with the *Manifesto* we must contend with some comments by Marx which further complicate the Libertarian interpretation. Private letters from the period indicate that Marx and Engels had not abandoned their preference for centralism, or view of its necessity in social revolution. Writing to his friend Louis Kugelmann on April 12 (prior to the Commune's defeat), Marx says that the National Guard's "Central Committee surrendered its power too soon, to make way for the Commune." Ironically, the National Guard – effectively a soldiers council – embodied the Commune's principles of rank-and-file control far more effectively than the Commune itself.⁴² Yet Marx believed the Commune to be an assembly of mandated delegates appointed by the workers of Paris. His dismissal of the the National Guard's action was, instead, a critique of "honorable" scrupulosity" obstructing a strategy of revolutionary civil war.⁴³ More explicitly, Engels' letter to Carlo Terzaghi (drafted January 6, 1872), argues:

If there had been a little more authority and centralisation in the Paris Commune, it would have triumphed over the bourgeois. After the victory we can organise ourselves as we like, but for the struggle it seems to me necessary to collect all our forces

⁴⁰ Korsch, K. (ed. Kellner, D.) 1974. *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*. University of Texas Press: Austin. p. 207

⁴¹ One example is Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), an important articulation by Marx of the content of communism, and the need to avoid reformist rhetoric, but not a useful document for understanding Marx's theory of the State as an instrument of revolution. Another is Marx's analysis** of the revolutionary potential of the Russian peasantry. Both were originally written as private letters and subsequently suppressed by either their recipients or leading 'authorities' within the movement. **The rather short final draft of the *Letter to Vera Zasulich* (1881) has been used by Libertarian Marxists to suggest a break with a prior insistence on the need to develop productive forces under capitalism in the political form of a democratic republic as a necessary precondition to revolution. In other words, Orthodox Marxists had argued that a society must first pass through a period of capitalist production to reach socialism. This was a major source of theoretical justification for Bolshevik industrialisation policy and the brutal treatment of the peasantry, and has likewise led to reactionary positions in regards to indigenous peoples. However, prior drafts of the letter suggest that Marx believed this to be possible in Russia purely due to the level of international development. As such, only a global revolution could spare Russia the fate of undergoing a capitalist phase. For details, see: Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 24: Marx and Engels 1874–83*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. pp. 346–371. For informative discussion on this issue, see: Chattopadhyay, P. 2018. *Socialism and Commodity Production: Essay in Marx Revival*. Haymarket Books: Chicago. pp. 232-248

⁴² Ness, I. & Azzellini, D. 2011. *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control From the Commune to the Present*. Haymarket Books: Chicago. pp. 34-35

⁴³ Marx, K. & Engels, F. 2010. *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 44: Letters 1870–73*. Lawrence and Wishart: London. p. 132

into a single band and direct them on the same point of attack. And when people tell me that this cannot be done without authority and centralisation, and that these are two things to be condemned outright, it seems to me that those who talk like this either do not know what a revolution is, or are revolutionaries in name only.⁴⁴

Robert Graham's history of the First International, *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*, makes another important observation regarding *The Civil War in France*. Marx repeatedly declares the need to *smash* the 'ready-made state machinery,' but this is different to smashing the State as an *organisational form* and constructing *new forms* of workers' power. Marx and Engels were consistent advocates of democratic republics, and the machinery they wished to see smashed were the ready-made bureaucracies of Europe's despotic governments. Therefore, as Graham suggests, Marx's words should be taken as a call to replace the existing State with a *new* (albeit, democratic) one, in the sense of *a governmental apparatus existing above society*. To Marx, it was the *Communal administration* that would "serve as a lever" in the abolition of class society.⁴⁵ Marx presents the Commune as an assembly of delegates, accountable to some form of mandate, but it is in terms of an elected Council that he describes the process of transforming the relations of production. No such responsibility is given to the Parisian workers themselves,⁴⁶ who, through their popular clubs and associations, were groping towards a politics of workers' control and new forms of self-organisation. Marx himself notes these facts, but places no great emphasis on them.⁴⁷

We, therefore, appear to have a contradictory picture of Marx's view of the State, both over time and within specific works. Indeed, a year after the Commune, Marx and Engels would circulate a scathing attack on Bakunin and the anarchists, accusing them of engaging in either ludicrous fantasies or dishonest semantics. Marx and Engels asserted that they were no more 'statist' than the anarchists, and that, so far as the anarchists believed in the forceful overthrow of capitalism, they were likewise 'authoritarian' (rendering it a meaningless slur when used in the derogatory sense).⁴⁸ It is worth comparing Marx's widely read ode to the Paris Commune with their derisive summary of the anarchist vision:

[The anarchistic commune] invites [others] to reorganise themselves in a revolutionary way and then to send their responsible and recallable deputies, vested with their imperative mandates, to an agreed place where they will set up a federation of insurgent associations... a revolutionary *force* capable of triumphing over reaction...

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 293

⁴⁵ *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*. Ibid. pp. 153–154

⁴⁶ These words recall Marx's insistence that the proletariat's liberation would be an act of self-emancipation, carried out by 'the workers themselves.' This was first articulated by Marx in the *General Rules of the International* (1864), later adapted in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, and included by Engels in the 1888 and 1890 prefaces to *The Communist Manifesto*. For details, see Draper, H. 1971. 'The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels.' *The Socialist Register*, 1971. 81–109

⁴⁷ *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 22*. Ibid. p. 339

⁴⁸ The most infamous use of this argument – which essentially replicates the Marxist analysis of the State – can be found in Engels' *On Authority* (1872). Here 'authority' is equated with force (which anarchists support, viewing it as an act of liberation from authoritarian social relations) and also justified within political and economic institutions (which anarchists oppose). Conflating the two (authority as force, authority as specialised control over producers) we again find the accusation that anarchists are either indistinguishable from the state socialists or believe that social revolution can be accomplished without confronting capital and the State. For a brief summary of the conflicting definitions of 'authority,' see: *The First Socialist Schism*. Ibid. pp.142–145

Thus in this anarchistic organisation... we have first the Council of the Commune, then the executive committees which, to be able to do anything at all, must be vested with some power and supported by a police force; this is to be followed by nothing short of a federal *parliament*... Like the Commune Council, this parliament will have to assign *executive power* to one or more *committees* which by this act alone will be given an authoritarian character that the demands of the struggle will increasingly accentuate.⁴⁹

As a result, they assert that the anarchist alternative to state socialism constitutes,

a perfect reconstruction of all the elements of the “authoritarian State”; and the fact that we call this machine a “revolutionary Commune organised from bottom to top,” makes little difference.⁵⁰

Thus, *The Civil War in France*'s appraisal of the Commune as an alternative to the ‘political state’ appears to be almost entirely negated. At the same time, Marx and Engels suggest that anarchist ‘statism’ is evident in the fact that any proposed federation of workers’ associations would require force to achieve its ends. In addition to this, they contend that the coordination of these associations’ efforts would inevitably lead to the exercise of power by a central ‘authority’, requiring a police force, among other features of the State. Marx and Engels’ critique brings to mind some words of Lenin’s, which – incredibly – he took to be a defence of Marxism, rather than anarchism:

[They] simply cannot conceive of the possibility of voluntary centralism... of the voluntary fusion of the proletarian communes, for the purpose of destroying bourgeois rule... Like all philistines [they] picture centralism as something which can be imposed and maintained solely from above, and solely by the bureaucracy and the military clique.⁵¹

III. Definitions of the State: Marxist Obfuscation and the Anarchist Challenge

A close reading of the material thus far reviewed demonstrates a fluid, threefold use of the word ‘State’:

1.

As a mere synonym for ‘society’; a ‘state’ of affairs. (e.g. a capitalist state or society as opposed to a communist state or society).

⁴⁹ Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. pp. 110–111. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 111. These extracts are taken from *The Alliance of Socialist Democracy and the International Working Men’s Association: Report and Documents Published by Decision of the Hague Congress of the International* (1873), a factional pamphlet written in collaboration with Marx’s son in law, Paul Lafargue. I have included here the most relevant passages, as much of the critique is mistakenly directed at works falsely attributed to Bakunin. For details regarding their real authorship, see: Leier, M. 2006. *Bakunin: The Creative Passion*. St Martin’s Press: New York. pp. 206–210

⁵¹ Lenin, V. I. 1964. *Collected Works: Volume 25: June-September 1917*. Progress Publishers: Moscow. p. 430. The original quote is directed at Eduard Bernstein in *State and Revolution*.

2.

Referring to the organisation of class rule. In a socialist context this amounts to *the act of revolution itself*; an armed populace actively carrying out a transformation of social relations by expropriating the means of production. This supposedly establishes the proletariat as ‘the new ruling class.’

3.

To indicate the specific governmental apparatus situated above society, which maintains class relations through its various instruments of coercion: the legislature, executive, judiciary, army, police, prisons, channels of information, schools, etc.

Applying the same term to three wildly different concepts became extremely useful, even central, to Marx and Engels’ strategy for establishing their theoretical influence over the International. By moving between the various definitions as necessary, it allowed them to effectively combat accusations of ‘authoritarianism’ (i.e., utilising ‘top-down’, statist methods) whilst simultaneously discrediting anarchism in the eyes of the workers movement as either dishonest or counter-revolutionary.⁵² Lenin, like most Marxists, is also guilty of this. Take, for instance, this passage from *State and Revolution*:

After overthrowing the yoke of the capitalists, should the workers “lay down their arms,” or use them against the capitalists in order to crush their resistance? But what is the systematic use of arms by one class against another if not a “transient form” of state?⁵³

The anarchist reply would be that this does *not* constitute a ‘transient form of state.’ Rather, it is a libertarian use of force. To be a ‘State’ it would need to be a specific, alienated apparatus of government which manages and reproduces the antagonisms of class society. Instead, it is the social revolution in progress; the self-organised transformation of the relations of production, and their forceful defence by the workers in arms.

Anarchism’s major theorists and political organisations have been clear in accepting only the third of Marx and Engels’ definitions. For anarchists, the State is a concrete, territorial array of institutions claiming the sole legitimate right to make laws and enforce them. In discussing the “governmental system” of the State, Proudhon refers to the investment of authority in “Administrative centralization” and the exercise of that authority via “Judicial hierarchy [and] police.” For “countries in which the democratic principle has become predominant” one could also expect a constitutional system of shared powers – populated by elected representatives, responsible for enacting laws (typically through majority rule) – and a bureaucracy overseeing the collection of taxes.⁵⁴ For Bakunin, the State consists of the branches of government (legislature, executive, judiciary, etc.) within defined borders, enforcing “the juridical consecration of privilege” via the “Church, University, Court of Law, Bureaucracy, Treasury, Police, and Army”. They are, together, “authority, domination, and force, organized by the property-owning and so-called enlightened

⁵² Given the trajectory of the Russian Revolution as well as references within *State and Revolution* to the ‘transitional’ need for ‘representative institutions,’ ‘subordination,’ and ‘bureaucracy,’ anarchists cannot simply dismiss this as a semantic issue. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the ‘proletarian vanguard’ would have necessarily – as Bakunin correctly noted – constituted a minority throughout much of the world, even at the time of the Russian Revolution (and certainly within Russia itself).

⁵³ Ibid. p. 436

⁵⁴ Proudhon, P. J. 1989. *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. Pluto Press: London. p 242

classes against the masses therefrom.”⁵⁵ As a final example, Peter Kropotkin’s *The State: Its Historic Role* (1896), later published in *Modern Science and Anarchy* (1914), summarises the anarchist definition thusly:

[The State] not only includes the existence of a power placed above society, but also of a territorial concentration and a concentration of many functions in the life of societies in the hands of a few. It implies some new relationships which did not exist before the formation of the State. A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing is developed to subject some classes to the domination of other classes.⁵⁶

The anarchist understanding of the State is, therefore, perfectly clear, unlike the Marxist one. A particularly concise articulation of Marx’s incoherent analysis can be found in his *Conspectus of Bakunin’s Statism and Anarchy* (1874), a series of private notes written in the margins of Bakunin’s 1873 book. In that work, Bakunin considered Marx and Engels’ argument that the revolutionary state “[would] be nothing other than ‘the proletariat raised to the level of a ruling class.’” In response he asked, “If the proletariat is to be the ruling class... then whom will it rule?”:

There must be yet a new proletariat which will be subject to this new rule, this new state... What does it mean, “the proletariat raised to a governing class?” Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 million be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one will be ruled. Then there will be no government; there will be no state...⁵⁷

Marx dismissed Bakunin’s anarchist critique with considerable contempt, declaring it to be “Schoolboy nonsense!”⁵⁸ In expanding upon his conception of ‘the proletariat as the ruling class’ he first claims that this refers solely to the collective ‘use of force’ (the ‘*employment of coercive, meaning governmental, measures*’) against “enemies and the old organisation of society,” which would “not vanish as a result of [the proletariat] coming to power.”⁵⁹ Simply put, the ‘proletarian state’ is manifested in any instance where the proletariat “has gained sufficient strength and is sufficiently well organised to employ general means of compulsion” in the suppression of their former masters.⁶⁰ It is this, rather than any specific form of social organisation, which

⁵⁵ Bakunin, M. (ed. Cutler, R. M.). 1992. *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871*. Prometheus Books: New York. pp. 140-121

⁵⁶ *Modern Science and Anarchy*. Ibid. p. 234

⁵⁷ *Statism and Anarchy*. Ibid. pp. 177–178. Here Bakunin echoes the analysis presented by Proudhon, who, in *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (1851), stated: “Government implies as a correlative somebody to be governed... if the whole people, claiming sovereignty, assumes Government, one seeks in vain where the governed will be... where will the producers be...? We must come to the last hypothesis, that wherein the People enters into Government in the mass, and wields all the branches of Power; in which they are always unanimous, and have above them neither president, nor representatives, nor deputies, nor law-made country, nor majority... if the People, thus organised for Power, have nothing above them, what, I ask, have they below?... where are the labourers? Will you answer that the People are everything at once, that they produce and legislate at the same time, that Labour and Government are united in them? It is impossible... the reason for the existence of government is the divergence of interests... When the mass of the People becomes the State, the State has no longer any reason to exist, since there is no longer any People, the governmental equation reduces to zero.” - *General Idea of the Revolution*. Ibid. pp. 158–161

⁵⁸ *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 148

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 147

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 149

would naturally ‘wither away’ following the disappearance of class struggle (i.e., the victory of that revolution).⁶¹ Furthermore, in responding to Bakunin’s question about ‘all 40 million Germans being members of the government,’ Marx replies that this is “Certainly” the case, “for the thing begins with the self-government of the commune.”⁶² As for the ‘head of government,’ Marx retorts:

And will everybody be at the top in Bakunin’s construction built from the bottom upwards? There will in fact be no below then.⁶³

This notion of the State – though unhelpfully referred to as such – is thus far *entirely in line with the anarchist conception of revolution*. Possible contradictions only emerge in Marx’s notes when he introduces references to elected managers and trade union executive committees:

Does in a trade union, for instance, the whole union constitute the executive committee? Will all division of labour in a factory disappear and also the various functions arising from it?⁶⁴

As has been pointed out by Alan Carter in *Marx: A Radical Critique*, this is an extremely weak rebuttal on Marx’s part, as it places no importance on the nature of the ‘executive committee’ – i.e., whether the committee functions as an assembly of mandated delegates, or as autonomous representatives.⁶⁵ The record of trade union officialdom serving the interests of capital and the State, to the detriment of rank-and-file struggle, should be enough to embarrass Marxists who read the *Conspectus* today.

It is likely that the delegate-representative issue is at the heart of the Bakunin-Marx dispute over political organisation, and so a fundamental difference in the Marxist and anarchist theorisations of the State. As we have seen, Marx’s references to the appropriate model of organisation for revolutionary struggle are contradictory, and feature little discussion of decision-making practices. Anarchists, however, have long emphasised the necessary unity between means and ends,

⁶¹ ‘Withers away’ is one of two popular translations from Engels’ famous text, *Anti-Duhring* (1878) (the other being ‘dies out’). The full text (here, the ‘withers away’ version) is worth quoting at length, as it encapsulates many of the contradictions and misrepresentations explored in this pamphlet: “*The first act in which the state really comes forward as the representative of the society as a whole – the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – is at the same time its last independent act as a state. The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the process of production. The state is not “abolished,” it withers away. It is from this standpoint that we must appraise the phrase “free people’s state” – both its justification at times for agitational purposes, and its ultimate scientific inadequacy – and also the demand of the so-called anarchists that the state should be abolished overnight.*” - Engels, F. 1939. *Marxist Library: Works of Marxism – Leninism Volume XVIII: Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science (Anti-Duhring)*. New York International Publishers: New York. p. 315

⁶² Marx, Engels, Lenin: *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 150

⁶³ Ibid. p. 149

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Carter writes: “*this might have seemed to Marx a century ago to be a satisfactory rejoinder, but it can hardly do today. In the infancy of trade unions, which is all that Marx knew, the possibility of the executives of a trade union becoming divorced from the ordinary members may not have seemed to him to be a likely outcome. We, however, have behind us a long history of union leaders ‘selling out’ and being out of touch with their members. Time has ably demonstrated that to reject Bakunin’s fears on the basis of the practice of trade union officials constitutes a woeful complacency with regard to power and privilege – a complacency that has born ample fruit in the form of present Marxist parties and ‘communist’ societies.*” - Carter, A. 1988. *Marx: A Radical Critique*. Westview Press: Boulder. pp. 217-218

both in terms of practical activity and organisational structure. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, unlike Marx, publicly advocated the use of “imperative mandate... and permanent revocability” as a libertarian alternative to statist representation. As Robert Graham notes:

The use of revocable delegates with imperative mandates was continued by Proudhon’s followers and other antiauthoritarians in the International [while] Marx and his allies favoured the use of representatives who were free to support policy positions contrary to the views of the people they were claiming to represent.⁶⁶

This disagreement between the factions around Bakunin and Marx was brought to the fore during the attempt to impose electoral politics on the sections committed to abstention. The anti-authoritarian sections of the International argued (in keeping with Bakunin’s theoretical insights) that workers’ organisations of struggle could not replicate the structure of the State or seek to take on its institutional function, given the role of the State in reproducing class society.⁶⁷

Engels provides the most explicit rejection of the anarchist insistence on a necessary unity between means and ends in his 1872 response to Bakunin in *Der Volksstaat*:

We Germans have earned a bad name for our mysticism, but we have never gone the length of such mysticism. The International is to be the prototype of a future society in which there will be no executions a la Versailles, no courts martial, no standing armies, no inspection of private correspondence, and no Brunswick criminal court! Just now, when we have to defend ourselves with all the means at our disposal, the proletariat is told to organise not in accordance with the requirements of the struggle... but according to the vague notions of a future society entertained by some dreamers.⁶⁸

Marx joined his comrade in ridiculing the notion of those fighting the revolution being capable of self-governance. Referring to Bakunin’s notion of a ‘federation of the barricades’, they write:

... odd barricades, these barricades of the [anarchists], where instead of fighting they spend their time writing mandates...⁶⁹

Nevertheless, let us, for the sake of argument, give Marx and the Libertarian interpretation of the *Conspectus* the benefit of the doubt. This raises the question as to what the Marxist critique of anarchism *actually is*. If the commune or council is an assembly of mandated delegates, in which the self-managed organisations of the working class are not governed by anyone from above; if ‘the State’ merely refers to the coordinated (or ‘centralised’) efforts of these free associations to expropriate the means of production, and defend this transformation of social relations, we are forced to conclude that Marx and Bakunin were simultaneously *both anarchists and statists*. The accuracy of either description simply depends on which definition of ‘the State’ is applied. It is only in projecting one of his own chosen definitions of the State on to anarchist theory that Marx is able to assert that,

⁶⁶ *We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*. Ibid. pp. 35–36

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 145–146, 168–194

⁶⁸ *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. pp. 62–63

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 110

[In refusing to] employ means which will be discarded after the liberation [Mr. Bakunin] concludes that the proletariat should rather do nothing at all and wait for the day of universal liquidation.⁷⁰

It is left to the reader to determine if intellectuals as serious as Marx and Engels could have genuinely misinterpreted the anarchist literature so severely. A key comment within the *Conspicuous*, it should be noted, indicates no misunderstanding. Marx ‘corrects’ Bakunin’s assertion that Marxists understand a revolutionary government to consist of “governing the people by means of a small number of representatives elected by the people”, claiming that this is *Bakunin’s* view, and not his own. Marx proceeds to explain that “the nature of elections” would change with the transformation of their “economic basis.” As a result, he claims that in such circumstances,

(1) government functions no longer exist; (2) the distribution of general functions becomes a routine matter and does not entail any domination; (3) elections completely lose their present political character.

This acknowledgement by Marx that he Bakunin had *different definitions of the State* suggests other, less innocent motives for his misrepresentations.

Lacking in a sufficiently materialist analysis of the state-form, Marx interprets Bakunin’s rejection of all States as the rejection of an ‘abstraction.’⁷¹ But for anarchists, the State has never been understood in such terms. Instead, the movement has merely taken the common, socialist understanding of the State’s origin and historical function seriously. As a result, it has reasoned that the State cannot be the vehicle through which capitalist social relations are overthrown. For Marx and Engels, class distinctions would have to be abolished before their vaguely defined ‘revolutionary state’ could be disposed of. And yet, at the same time, they also appear to agree that the State exists to regulate the social relations of class society, its processes of accumulation, and that its continued existence presupposes the perpetuation of class distinctions within the mode of production. This analysis led Bakunin to note that any revolutionary state purporting to consist of ‘workmen’ will instead consist of “former workmen.” In turn, Marx responded that a worker-turned-representative no more ceases to be a workman than “a manufacturer cease[s] to be a capitalist on becoming a town-councillor.”⁷²

Here, and throughout their collected works, Marx and Engels appear to forget that the proletariat is defined by its class position in the existing mode of production, and that the State is not a neutral instrument within that arrangement. In taking hold of any part of the State machinery, the manufacturer, indeed, continues to occupy a structural position within the management of producers and capital. This is, however, a position that the proletariat, by definition, lacks. It is clear, then, that Bakunin’s observation logically follows; that a worker is tasked with the management and perpetuation of class society upon entering an apparatus designed for that purpose,

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 152. Or, as he and Engels repeatedly put it, the anarchists “[either do not] know what they are talking about” or they do and are instead explicitly calling for the workers to ‘lay down their arms,’ rather than fight. - *Marx and Engels Collected Works, Volume 23*. Ibid. p. 425.

⁷¹ Marx writes: “Thus it is not the Bonapartist State, the Prussian or Russian State that has to be overthrown, but an abstract State, the State as such, a State that nowhere exists.” - *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Ibid. p. 108

⁷² Ibid. p. 151

and which cannot function without control over the economic life of society. As such, Proudhon concluded in *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846) that the modern state, “[created] to serve as a mediator between labor and privilege, finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat”.⁷³ Bakunin, in agreement on the nature of political institutions, similarly declared that,

by its very nature and under the threat of self-destruction [the State] must inexorably and at all costs strive for the realization of its objectives regardless of or even against the will of [those] wielding it.⁷⁴

In a society where property remains in the hands of a distinct class of property-owners, the reason for this is perfectly clear. As Errico Malatesta states in his pamphlet, *Anarchy* (1891):

With [private property] comes the division of the two sorts of power, that of the persons who control the collective force of society, and that of the proprietors, upon whom these governors become essentially dependent, because the proprietors command the sources of the said collective force... How could it be otherwise? If the government should reach the point of becoming hostile, if the hope of democracy should ever be more than a delusion deceiving the people, the proprietary class, menaced in its interests, would at once rebel, and would use all the force and influence which come from the possession of wealth, to reduce the government to the simple function of acting as policeman.⁷⁵

However, direct control by the State over production also fails to fundamentally alter the relations of production. As Malatesta notes in an article entitled *The Socialist State* (1897):

When Friedrich Engels claimed, perhaps to fend off the anarchist critique, that once classes have disappeared, the State per se no longer has any reason to be and turns from government of men to administration of things, he was just playing on words. Whoever has dominion over things, has dominion over men; whoever governs production governs the producer.⁷⁶

Moreover, as Malatesta’s *Anarchy* rightly notes, the nature of the State is that of an alienated political institution, with the power to make and impose laws. This means that, independent of all other factors, it requires a minimum degree of coercive capacity and the ability to reproduce itself. It therefore follows that,

[the State’s] principal characteristic and indispensable instruments are the bailiff and the tax collector, the soldier and the prison.⁷⁷

⁷³ Proudhon, P. J. 2019. *System of Economic Contradictions: Or, The Philosophy of Misery*. Anodos Books: Whithorn. p. 189

⁷⁴ *Statism and Anarchy*. Ibid. p. 195

⁷⁵ Malatesta, E. (ed. Turcato, D.). 2014. *The Method of Freedom: An Errico Malatesta Reader*. AK Press: Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore, Chico. pp. 116-118

⁷⁶ Malatesta, E. 2017. (ed. Turcato, D.). *The Collected Works of Errico Malatesta, Volume III, “A Long and Patient Work...”*: *The Anarchist Socialism of L’agitazione, 1897–1898*, AK Press: Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore, Chico. p.123

⁷⁷ *The Method of Freedom*. Ibid. p. 118

Conclusions

Though Marx intended to dedicate an entire volume of *Capital* to developing his analysis of the State,⁷⁸ only the first volume was completed in his lifetime, with the remaining two being posthumously assembled by Engels from various notebooks.⁷⁹ We are, as a result, left with scattered references to the subject which reveal a contradictory and shifting conception of its definition, function within capitalism, and role within the process of social revolution. In this pamphlet I have argued that, the early critique of Hegel aside, the younger Marx's political strategy was fundamentally statist. However, this was later complicated by material inspired by the Paris Commune, some of which gives the appearance of a much more libertarian approach. In this work, Marx either reframes the State as an abstract concept, such as an *act* of revolution, or advocates for the construction of a new kind of 'State.'⁸⁰ Though the description of this 'transitional' form was often vague and contradictory, the democratic statism of Marx and Engels remained fundamentally different to the distortions most 'Marxists' across the world would come to advocate.⁸¹

Libertarian developments aside, Marx and Engels remained hostile to anarchism throughout their lives and organised the International in a hierarchical fashion to combat its influence within the movement. They alternated between dismissing anarchist accusations of 'authoritarianism' as unfounded and misrepresenting anarchist theory in such a way as to obscure the differences between the two movements. The utility of such an approach is clear, as an accurate representation of the anarchist position clarifies the central contradiction within Marx's ever-evolving (and ultimately unrefined) theory of the State. In the final analysis, the Marxist position either becomes virtually identical in substance to the very ideology being denounced, or the anarchist critique must be accepted as legitimate – and the seizure of the government apparatus defended on its merits.

⁷⁸ Marx's notes indicate that an unwritten volume of *Capital* was intended to be dedicated entirely to an analysis of the state. Cited in Marx, K. 1990. 'Introduction by Ernest Mandel,' chapter in *Capital: Volume I*. Penguin Classics: London. p. 28

⁷⁹ Three if we include *Theories of Surplus Value*, edited by Karl Kautsky.

⁸⁰ Or, as Marx and Engels sometimes put it, 'a State which is not a State' in the conventional sense.

⁸¹ Here I am thinking particularly of those who identify as 'Marxist-Leninists', if not 'Stalinists'. For instance, on the question of dictatorship and Marx's use of the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' see, Draper, H. 1987. *The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' from Marx to Lenin*. Monthly Review Press: New York. Draper convincingly demonstrates that the term is used in a manner similar to Marx's second definition of 'the State' (i.e., as a reference to the use of revolutionary force).

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