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The Marxist End Goal Has Nothing To Do With Anarchy

zfq

June 2023

This is a brief response to the latest instance of “anarchist historian” Zoe Baker (Anarchist Studies PhD) proclaiming that anarchy and Marxism are one and the same.

From Zoe Baker’s Twitter Feed:

A (Marxist-Leninist) told me that my description of an anarcho-communist society was clearly a society with a state. I didn’t have the heart to explain that its the same as Marx’s description of higher phase communism and they would know this if they’d read Marx.

The tweet was quickly turned into a screenshot and spread to the usual anarcho-leftist haunts. Baker was praised for her anecdote, with one particularly sycophantic reply even calling her the “great anarchist of our time”.

“Great anarchists” don’t try to claim Marx/Engels’ concepts of communism and the state are compatible with anarchy. Anarchists oppose all domination, all coercion, all authority, all government — Marx and Engels absolutely did not. Marxists do not.

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Retrieved on 2025-09-05 from
https://raddle.me/wiki/Marxism_End_Goal

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Though it's rarely discussed by red anarchists who are eager to swallow the "shared end goal" pill, Marx didn't define the state the way anarchists (or anyone who isn't a Marxist) does.

But before I get into that, it's important to understand how Marx conceived of class. He really only recognized two classes: the owners of the means of production, or bourgeoisie, and the workers, or proletariat. He saw all people as falling under one of these two classes, and only concerned himself with issues that stemmed from this narrow class distinction.

Onto Marx's concept of the state. Marx saw the state as a tool that could be used by one class to oppress the other i.e. the ruling class using it against the working class (a capitalist system) or the working class using it against the ruling class (a socialist system). When Marx and Engels talked of a "stateless" society as their "end goal", they weren't at all talking about ending government or even necessarily what we know as the state, since to them, the "state" was simply a tool that could be used to oppress one of the two categories of people he recognized as a distinct class.

Inspired by the earlier writings of Henri de Saint-Simon, Marx and Engels proposed replacing the arrangement whereupon the state administers people directly with a new arrangement where a body of bureaucrats "administer things". They theorized that once class (the divide between business owners and workers) had been abolished, the "state" (by which they actually meant "class oppression", don't forget) would cease to exist and be replaced with two successive forms of government, with the second being their professed end goal — what Marxists baselessly term "stateless communism" but which in actuality isn't stateless at all.

With their ill-conceived "administration of things", Marx and Engels proposed granting control over the things people depend on to survive and prosper to appointed administrators — functionaries of the state (except they didn't call it a state).

During the transition to communism, they wanted to replace government that worked for the bourgeois with government that

inability to reckon with the repeated failed historical attempts to wrangle with these circular proposals for implementing “better” government.

If even liberals like Raymond Aron had the wherewithal to decipher what the administration of things actually entailed decades ago, there’s no excuse for so-called anarchists to be clinging onto these absurd authoritarian building blocks in 2022.

Raymond Aron:

“The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have shown that if there is one false notion it is that the administration of things can replace the government of people. It has emerged very clearly that if you want to administer all objects you must control all individuals at the same time.”

Daniel Bell:

“The administration of things — the substitution of rational judgment for politics — is the hallmark of technocracy. [...]The evolution of technocratic society, things ride men.”

Ben Kafka:

Saint-Simon’s formula, with its utopian hope that paperwork might someday be used to emancipate humanity, had instead become shorthand for dehumanization. Had not the abolition of political life led to the gulags? And the administration of things to the kulaks?

worked for the workers. **A people’s government**, and then eventually, once achieving the mythic end goal (the “higher phase communism”), they’d replace the people’s government with the “administration of things” bureaucracy and declare communism had been achieved.

The bureaucracy would be yet another form of government of course, but this time it would supposedly be so streamlined, efficient and effective that it would govern society with minimal brutality and exploitation, sidestepping the violent struggle that comes with boss/worker class relations.

This just demonstrates how shortsighted Marxists are, not being able to grasp the inevitability of a bureaucrat politburo also arising as a distinct class in society and presenting yet another oppressive power imbalance that will inescapably need to be held together by a monopoly on violence wielded by a police and military legitimized by a state form... To pretend otherwise would be to ignore the history of government in all its barely-distinctive incarnations. Government begets coercion, domination, violence, control, subjugation. Forever and always.

This was how Marx and Engels conceived of their “stateless” end goal — a massive bureaucracy that would govern every cog in every machine all across the communist world. A government by any reasonable definition and therefor completely and absolutely incompatible with anarchy.

How this new “administration of things” government would manage to be uniquely liberatory is anyone’s guess, as neither Marx nor Engels chose to elaborate in much detail on what they presented as their final solution to oppressive power relations beyond what I’ve described in this essay. As usual, the Marxist inability to grapple with oppressive hierarchical constructs that reach beyond the narrow boss/worker relationship shows that they’re not even on the same playing field as anarchists, who refuse to simply patch up the leaks in the system with used chewing gum and call it a day.

This absurd concept of an end-goal naturally led future Marxists like Lenin and Stalin to commit all manner of atrocities in the name of progressing to the mythic final stage of Marxism whereupon the bureaucrats somehow create world peace by governing the things people use and need to survive, rather than by governing the people themselves.

If it doesn't make sense to you, you're a lot more astute than the learned Marxist historians who try to affix themselves to anarchist discourse. They've fully embraced and internalized this supposed end goal and decided it's not only a logical train of thought, but is the ideal anarchists ought to also strive for.

This "final form" of government, as it was understood by a long succession of Marxist leaders who tried to implement it, would effectively result in the state stripping people of any individual agency they might have had under the previous two arrangements, instead leaving all decisions on the managing of tools, production, economic resource allocation, logistics and even wider social arrangements in the hands of their superiors. This would inevitably extend to workers' livelihoods and personal relationships since the administrators would have control over their time, assigning them tasks and deciding whether their performance is adequate, thus dictating their social standing.

Every time Marxists attempted to implement the administration of things historically, it of course just resulted in the reproduction of capitalism and the further oppression of the workers, who were now being told they had to put up with grueling unrewarding labor "for the revolution".

The "end goal" Marxists talk of clearly isn't anarchy, and it's not even stateless communism. Bureaucrats managing society is still a state by any definition other than the warped Marxist definition. The claimed distinction between administering things and governing people has no real validity when the people require access to the things to survive.

Marxists do not want a world without government. They do not oppose what everyone but them defines as the state. They do not share anarchist goals. They have zero critique of all the forms of authority we have to contend with outside of class. Unlike anarchists, they simply assume all these forms of authority will magically wither away with the capitalist/worker class divide.

By officiating supervisors and giving them power over others, Marxists ensure the rise of a bureaucrat class and ensure the individual will be suppressed in favor of the collective; which in most cases simply means the state, or at least the organization utilizing each individual's labor.

People who think anarchists and Marxists have the same goals have very little understanding of anarchist ideas.

Zoe Baker is a Marxist who does blatant entryism to convince baby anarchists that Marxism and anarchy are one and the same. They're not. The most basic and fundamental principle of anarchy is the rejection of government — while Marxism not only has no problem with government, it actively attempts to re-define basic words to avoid taking a stance against all the things anarchists oppose.

By redefining and obfuscating the concepts of authority, government, state and communism, Marx was able to avoid putting forward any truly revolutionary proposals and instead dealt a deadly blow to the actual revolutionary politics of his contemporaries by presenting watered-down, conservative perversions of their own theories that nonetheless had the advantage of being funded and widely-distributed by Engels and his connections, not to mention the glorious benefit of appealing to the power machinations of the party politburo in the making.

Or to put it in a way a basic Twitter leftist will understand: Marx Bided your Bernie Sanders, Starmered your Jeremy Corbyn.

Zoe Baker's ready embrace of Marx's half-baked, counter-productive proposals for restructuring society in the image of a bureaucrat class betrays her utter lack of imagination and