

Black Flag

FOR ANARCHIST
RESISTANCE

The State or Revolution

During the run-up to the Iraq invasion, Blair was praised for ignoring the wishes of the general public. Over a million marched for peace, he went to war. This was called “good leadership.”

Anarchists were not surprised. We have long argued that the state was designed for minority class rule, to exclude the majority from social decision making. Only in this way can class society be maintained. For this reason we are opposed to the state, which exists to protect the interests of a privileged minority (today, the capitalist class). Blair's actions expose the hypocrisy of capitalist democracy — claiming to represent the people while disempowering them in favour of the rule of capital.

For Marxists, the issue of the state is different. While agreeing with anarchism that the current state is an instrument of capitalist rule, they argue that a new kind of state (a “workers’ state”) can be created in which working class people can run society. This state exists to defend the revolution and would “wither away” over time.

Anarchists disagree. As the state is based on the delegation and centralisation of power, real democracy is only possible once it is destroyed. Turning the organisations created by the working class during the revolution into a state would destroy them, making them little more than rubber stamps for the party leaders. A new ruling class would develop and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” would become the dictatorship *over* the proletariat. The revolution, anarchists argued, can defend itself without a state.

Rhetoric or Reality?

Until October 1917, these discussions were limited to theory. Then, with the Russian Revolution, there was a chance to see who was right. Ironically, both Leninists and anarchists say it confirms their ideas.

The former argue that it shows that Leninism stands for real democracy and socialism, that it confirms the validity of Marxism and its ideas on changing society. The latter argue that it shows the utter bankruptcy of Marxism. For anarchists, the Russian revolution was destroyed by

Leninist practice and ideas. Economically, the Bolshevik version of socialism was simply state capitalism. Politically, the soviets became a thin veneer for party dictatorship.

So how can one event have such diverse

professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies can all be found in Bakunin. This explains its numerous straw man arguments against anarchism. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin's work is the

call for “strict centralism” and the equation of soviets with a “new” state.

This was its downfall. Lenin's “workers’ state” just became the same as the old state. So to discuss “**State and Revolution**” without indicating this suggests a lack of honesty. We cannot look at Bolshevik theory and not its practice.

Lenin in power

For Bolshevism, “workers’ power” was identified with party power. Throughout 1917, Lenin argued for the **Bolsheviks** to seize power, by means of the soviets. And in

October, it was the Bolsheviks who seized power, **not** the working class or its soviets. Soon, from bottom to top, the soviets became marginalised, with effective power relentlessly gravitating to the party.

The Bolsheviks originally did have working class support, but this does not equal working class people running society. This became clear once the workers turned away from them — the Bolsheviks simply refused to be held accountable to the soviets whose power they had usurped.

Faced with losing soviet elections across Russia in the spring and summer of 1918, the Bolsheviks simply disbanded, by force, any soviet elected with a non-Bolshevik majority. In Petrograd and Moscow, elections were postponed until the Bolsheviks gerrymandered the soviets to ensure their majority, making the results of the workplace elections irrelevant.

“the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries... the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot direct exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard.”

“He says that we understand by the words dictatorship of the proletariat what is actually the dictatorship of its determined and conscious minority. And that is the fact.”

“Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people.”

“there is not the least contradiction between soviet (i.e., socialist) democracy and the use of dictatorial power by a few persons.”

History's “Hidden Democrat” speaks!



“When we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party... we say, ‘Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position.’”

“Our party aims to obtain political power for itself.”

interpretations? Quite easily. Marxists concentrate on what the Bolsheviks said **before** they seized power while anarchists look at what they said and did **afterwards**. As Marx said, we can only judge a person by what they do, not what they say.

Sadly, most Leninists seem strangely adverse to Marx's comments. When confronted with the reality of Lenin's Russia we are told to read his “**State and Revolution**.” Which is as unconvincing as Tony Blair asking us to forget the invasion of Iraq by pointing out that it was not in the New Labour election manifesto.

State and Revolution

No one can deny that Lenin's “**State and Revolution**” is a classic, if flawed, work. Much that passes for “Marxism” in it is pure anarchism. For example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for

The SWP versus Anarchism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers' organisations which carry on the direct struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector — the State." (Kropotkin)

This attack on workers' freedom occurred everywhere. The Bolsheviks abolished the election of officers in the Red Army and replaced workers' self-management in production with one-man management. The workers' factory committees were overruled by the party leadership, who preferred state control over workers' control. By April, 1918, Lenin was arguing for "*obedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected or appointed by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers.*" What counted was not workplace democracy, but state property and Bolshevik power. Capitalism was simply replaced with state capitalism.

Lenin reneged on his promise to replace the army and police by "*the armed masses of workers.*" Instead he created a political police force (the Cheka) and a normal army -- special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. They had to be, as they repressed working class unrest under Lenin.

Thus, by the summer of 1918, Russia was under the de facto dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. Instead of "*all power to the soviets*" we got "*all power to the party.*"

Leninists try to distance themselves from Stalinism, correctly arguing that it was a brutal and undemocratic system. The problem is that it was Lenin and Trotsky rather than Stalin who first shot strikers, banned left papers, radical organisations and party factions, sent workers and revolutionaries to the gulags, advocated and introduced one-man management and piece-work in the workplace, eliminated democracy in the military and shut down soviets who elected the 'wrong' delegates.

International Capitalism made me do it!

Faced with these facts, Leninists argue that "objective" factors account for this failure of Bolshevism, not its ideology.

Foremost of these is the Civil War. Yet this is easily refuted as the elimination of soviet, workplace and military democracy, the attacks on opposition groups as well as basic civil liberties occurred *before* it began. And it is illogical. Leninists argue for a "workers' state" because, to quote Lenin, they know that no revolution "*has escaped civil war.*" So if civil war is inevitable, then how can it be blamed for the failure of Bolshevism? Even if this excuse was factually correct (and it is not) then it is a damning indictment of Leninism.

Another excuse is that the working class was so decimated that the replacement of class power by party power was inevitable. Yet this substitution occurred from day one, when the Bolsheviks took state power. Moreover, the Russian workers were capable of collective action throughout this period. Every year saw massive strike waves periodically sweeping across Russia, waves which the Bolsheviks meet with state repression. A "decimated" and "atomised" working class does not require martial law and lockouts to control!

Yet it did not have to be like that. There was an alternative which shows that Bolshevik ideology played a key role in the failure of the revolution and the rise of Stalinism. The anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement showed that soviet democracy and workers' control were possible in Russia at this time. They promoted workers' and peasants' control. They practised freedom of speech and assembly. They called democratic soviet congresses. The army was democratic. They did everything Lenin promised but failed to deliver. Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks betrayed them

Keeping the rabble in line

Anarchists argue that the state is structured like it is, with the centralisation of power at the top, to ensure that the masses are disempowered and cannot influence decisions, never mind run society itself. Once in power, the Bolshevik leaders soon became converts to this aspect of the state. For them, a public power distinct from the masses was a good thing precisely because it deterred democracy. Even worse, for all the leading Bolsheviks party dictatorship became an essential aspect of any revolution.

By 1921 Trotsky was arguing that the party was "*obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes*" for it was "*entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy.*" This was no temporary aberration. Sixteen years later, he repeated the same argument: "*the revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders*

the masses to the counter-revolution.” It was the “revolutionary party... seizing power,” rather than the whole working class, for “those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat.”

His defence of party power over people power was based not on defence of the revolution. Rather “the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity.” The state was required because the masses could not govern themselves. As he put it two years later, “the very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves . . . if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself.”

Of course, everyone is “backward” compared to the vanguard, so party dictatorship is the logical conclusion. A conclusion that neither Trotsky nor Lenin was shy in drawing or applying. Yet modern day Leninists ask us to forget this and the period he and Lenin held state power in favour of a glorified election manifesto!

For Lenin in power, “revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.” Ironically, “*State and Revolution*” comes back to haunt him. There he had argued it was “clear that where there is suppression there is also violence, there is no freedom, no democracy.” If the working class itself is being subject to “revolutionary” suppression by the vanguard then, clearly, there is “no freedom, no democracy” for our class. Nor was there under Bolshevism.

State or Revolution?

Thus anarchism was confirmed by Bolshevism in power. No state can represent the interests of the working classes due to its centralised and hierarchical nature — all it can do is represent the interests of the elite in power, its own bureaucratic needs and privileges and slowly, but surely, remove itself from popular control. Bolshevism was no exception.

The state implies the delegation of power and initiative into the hands of a few leaders who form the “revolutionary government.” Yet the power of any revolution derives from the **decentralisation** of power, from the active participation of the masses in the collective social movement and the direct action it generates. As soon as this power passes out of the hands of the working class, the revolution is doomed: the counter-revolution has begun and it matters little that it is draped in a red flag. Hence anarchist opposition to the state.

But does it matter? Yes, because modern day Leninists think we should follow the Bolshevik model. They argue for a centralised vanguard party and the creation of a “workers’ state.” This shapes their attitude to current movements as well as socialism, shaping both in their own image. Yet these hierarchical, centralised, top-down structures hinder participation and initiative, alienating the many and turning them into spectators in their own struggles. As in capitalism, a formal democracy (sometimes not even that!) hides the domination of a few leaders. Rather than build the new world in the struggle against the old, Leninism reproduces all the problems of class society in “revolutionary” movements. Ultimately, they deter not only socialism but the struggle to make things better today.

The issue is simple. Either you have a participatory federation of directly democratic workplace and community assemblies (anarchism) or you have a state with party power in the name of the masses (Bolshevism). The fundamental flaw in Leninism is that it confuses the two and ensures the result anarchists predicted so accurately.

Another world is possible?

Carlo Giuliani’s father said that “Carlo didn’t accept the notion that eight leaders of the world should decide the life and death of hundreds of thousands of people.” A perspective we can all agree with. Let us see if the Bolshevism is an improvement. In **Left-wing Communism** we find Lenin describing the Bolshevik regime as follows:

“The Party, which holds annual congresses... , is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress... This, then, looks like a real ‘oligarchy.’ Not a single important political decision is decided by any State institution in our republic without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party...”

Combined with “non-Party workers’ and peasants’ conferences” and Soviet Congresses, this was “the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed ‘from above,’ from the standpoint of the practical realisation of the dictatorship.” And so “all talk about ‘from above’ or ‘from below,’ about ‘the dictatorship of leaders’ or ‘the dictatorship of the masses,’ cannot but appear to be ridiculous, childish nonsense.”

Yet if the congresses of soviets were “more democratic” than anything in the “best democratic republics of the bourgeois world,” why did the Bolsheviks need non-Party conferences “to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands”?

And how did Lenin “respond” to their “demands”? The conferences met a similar fate to the soviets in 1918: they were disbanded. For during the labour disturbances of late 1920 and early 1921 they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies. The Bolshevik repression of the revolts, strikes and protests explains why Lenin did not bother to view “proletarian state power” from “below,” from the perspective of the working class.

So the difference is clear. Under capitalism, 8 people make life and death decisions for millions. Under Bolshevism, 19 people made them.

A massive improvement in terms of freedom and democracy, all would agree.

Answers to Anarcho-Quiz

1. No. He was clear that “the organisational principle of revolutionary Social-Democracy” was to “proceed from the top downward.” It was “opportunist Social-Democracy” which strove “to proceed from the bottom upward” (the “overzealous” carried this “to the point of anarchism”).
2. He redefined “workers’ democracy” to mean “democracy within the party” while supporting party dictatorship. 1923 saw him argue that the “dictatorship of the Party” did “not require revision.” In 1927, it was a case of “the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party.” The 1930s saw similar comments.
3. He argued that “because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.” This was because the “dictatorship of a proletarian party” was an “objective necessity.” So much for “workers’ power.”
4. Trotsky. He planned to use poison gas against the Kronstadt rebels revolting for soviet democracy in 1921 if conventional warfare failed.

Out of Context?

Think all these quotes are out of context? Then visit these webpages on the anarchist critique of Marxism to get references and context:

Anarchism and the Left: www.anarchism.ws/left.html
Criticising the authoritarian “left”: www.infoshop.org/texts/iso.html
An Anarchist FAQ on Marxism: www.infoshop.org/faq/secHcon.html
www.infoshop.org/faq/append3.html

What is Anarchism?

History has spoken. Marxism has failed. Its main forms, Social Democracy and Bolshevism, proved anarchism right. The former became as reformist as we predicted. The Russian Revolution showed that the dictatorship of the proletariat would become the dictatorship *over* the proletariat.

But there is an alternative to Leninism's state capitalism and party power. It is called anarchism, a socialism which places freedom and working class management of society at the core of its vision of struggle, revolution and socialism. For anarchists, these are not optional extras which can be dispensed with as long as the right party holds state power. Not for anarchists the Bolshevik refrain of "defending the gains of the revolution" while violently repressing working class revolts for freedom and real democracy.

So what does anarchism stand for? Many take Lenin's comments in "*State and Revolution*" seriously when he asserted anarchists "while advocating the destruction of the state machine, have absolutely no idea of *what* the proletariat will put in its place" and that we would "lay down our arms" after a revolution. This is rubbish, as Bakunin argued:

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

Socialism will be free, or it will not be at all Anarchists know what we will replace the state and capitalism with, a free federation of the directly democratic organisations created in the class struggle. These organs of class power will be the framework of a free society.

Capitalism can only be destroyed when workers expropriate their workplaces directly, using direct action to kick out the bosses. Once under workers' management, their socialisation is achieved by them federating together. The state will be destroyed by a federation of community assemblies. In both cases, decisions flow from the bottom-up by means of mandated and recallable delegates. Such a system is no impossible dream, it has existed in every popular revolution.

Our goal is freedom, equality and solidarity. All three are interdependent. Without equality, freedom is meaningless. And equality must be political as well as economic. There can be no equality between those in government and those subject to it and so equality without freedom is impossible. Anarchists, therefore, are the most logical and complete socialists, since we demand for every person not just their part of society's wealth but also their portion of social power.

Real socialism, anarchism, will be created and run from below. We reject the simplistic Marxist idea that the state is "*an armed machine*." This fails to address the real issue,



namely that of power. Anarchists know that a revolution needs defending. The real question is who has the power. Is it the working class, in its own class organisations, or will it be a "revolutionary" government, a handful of leaders at the top using the state machine to impose its own concept on socialism onto the masses?

Anarchy in Action

Revolutionary anarchism sees class struggle as the only means of changing society. We need to organise collectively in our communities and workplaces to make real change. Only direct action and solidarity can create a power capable of not only resisting current oppression and injustice but also of changing society.

Anarchists reject electioneering. One hundred years of it produced Blair. Nor do we think marching from A to B is sufficient. If the millions who marched on February 15th had also used direct action to bring the world to a halt, then war in Iraq could have been stopped. We need to regain a sense of our own power to change things and that can only happen when we organise outside parliament and take direct action. Whether its stopping a war, getting a pay rise or saving a hospital or school, it gets results.

Anarchism is not some distant dream. We can apply it in our struggles and organisations today. Real democracy is impossible without the active and permanent participation of all the members of a group, something centralisation, by its nature, excludes. So a revolutionary organisation must reflect this, being run from the grass-roots upwards, directly democratic and co-ordinated by mandated, recallable delegates. Only self-management today can ensure freedom and equality after the revolution.

If we want to change the world, we must start by changing the way we organise and fight today.

Anarcho-Quiz

1. The SWP like to include Lenin in the tradition they call "*socialism from below*." Would he have agreed?
2. The SWP portray Trotsky as supporting "*workers' democracy*" against Stalinism. What was unusual about his position?
3. The SWP point to the Spanish Revolution of 1936 to prove anarchism is flawed. What was Trotsky's advice to the Spanish workers?
4. Churchill infamously wanted to gas rebels in Iraq in the 1920s. Which equally famous politician wanted to do the same to rebel workers in Russia around the same time?

Black Flag



For a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

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Anarchist Federation
www.afed.org.uk

Solidarity Federation
www.solfed.org.uk

Class War
www.classwaruk.org

Anarchist Youth Network
www.anarchistyouth.net