

Letter to Socialist Resistance

Phil Hearse's attempt to reply to anarchist criticism was wonderfully self-contradictory. He wants a government, dismissing direct democracy as impossible, yet also argues that this "does not imply a delegation of overall social and political power by the working class"! He maintains that "majority rule is part of the central definition of workers democracy" while also arguing that "for us all democracy is representative." In other words, *minority* rule by the handful of leaders elected by the majority. Rather than the actual "self-organised power of the workers" we get a government only "based" on it.

Anarchists reject this sophistry. The key issue is, as I said, power. When I said the Bolsheviks aimed at party power, Hearse asserts that I am "presumably referring to Lenin's insentience that the Bolsheviks . . . take the initiative for the insurrection of October 1917." No, I was referring to Lenin's constant refrain that they "can and must take state power into their own hands." Hearse claims that workers and community councils would rule, yet Lenin argued that "it is impossible to refuse a purely Bolshevik government without treason to the slogan of the power of the Soviets, since a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets . . . handed power over to this government." "All power to party leadership via the soviets" is a more accurate description of Leninist ideology.

But, Hearse asserts, "revolutionary marxists see workers' power being exercised through the self-rule of the workers . . . not through dictatorship of a particular party." Does this mean that Lenin and Trotsky were not "revolutionary marxists"? According to Lenin, "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 . . .'" He, like Hearse, dismissed the idea that the whole working class could rule for "in all capitalist countries . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation. It can be exercised only by a vanguard." Trotsky agreed, arguing (in 1937!) that the "revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party" was "an objective necessity" and that the "revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution."

Perhaps Hearse will argue that this was due to the "conditions of civil war." Yet he significantly ignores the fact that the Bolsheviks had been disbanding soviets and imposing one-man management before it started. They had also been repressing the left. He asserts that "decisive action was taken against the anarchists" after some bombed a Bolshevik meeting. That was in September 1919. A year and a half before, the Cheka had attacked the anarchists all across Russia — before the civil war started. Repression continued from then on. The bombing was in response to state repression, not its cause.

Ignoring the awkward fact that Bolshevik authoritarianism started before (and continued after) the civil war, Hearse argues that "decline of soviet democracy" was due to "the decline and near-disappearance of the proletariat." Yet massive strike waves against the Bolsheviks were a common feature of Lenin's Russia. A non-existent proletariat hardly needs martial law and lock-outs to tame it. The Bolsheviks suppressed the workers to remain in power. As Trotsky explained, the party was "entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with

the passing moods of the workers' democracy."

Hearse asserts that "there is nothing in the history of the Russian Revolution which constitutes proof that a revolutionary party disables revolution and workers power." He is wrong. Something does: the Makhnovist movement. Fighting the same civil war, the Bolsheviks were putting the "dictatorship of the party" at the core of their politics while the anarchists called democratic soviet congresses and protected freedom of speech

and association. Hearse claims that Makhno "was part" of the "counter-revolution." This is a lie. Makhno fought the Whites and the Bolsheviks for soviet democracy. Is soviet democracy "counter-revolution"? Significantly, the Bolsheviks worked with Makhno, betraying him once the Whites were defeated. The Makhnovists also refutes his assertion that we anarchists "can't" defend a revolution.

Hearse wonders if there "would have been a Russian revolution without the Bolshevik party?" If the striking women in February 1917 had listened to the Bolsheviks, the answer would have been no! However, Hearse makes the common Leninist assumption that opposition to vanguardism means rejecting "the need for the organisation and leadership role of the most consistent revolutionaries." Anarchists disagree and form anarchist groups to influence the class struggle. However, unlike Leninism, we do not see these groups as seizing power on behalf of the masses.

"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."



"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."

From the Horse's mouth...

Equally, anarchists are well aware that an ideal socialist society will not be created immediately after a revolution. The task of working class organs (like federations of factory committees and neighbourhood assemblies) is to build it. However, all state institutions (like capitalist ones) do need to be destroyed. To keep them would be to retain inequality of power between a few leaders and the masses. As Lenin's regime showed, these soon come into conflict — a conflict Leninism always resolves in favour of party power.

Finally, there is the question of "politics." Anarchists do not ignore political issues ("public affairs"). Rather we argue that they be fought on our class terrain, by direct action and solidarity. We do reject electionism because it does not work. Hearse points to SSP doing a "brilliant job" in the Scottish Parliament. One hundred years ago the Marxist Social Democrats were doing a "brilliant job" in the German Parliament. Yet the Marxists soon became reformist, watering down their principles to get more votes. The means used became an end in itself. Come 1914, the chickens came home to roost and the "socialists" voted for war credits. As in so many things, Bakunin, not Marx, was proven correct.

Hearse wants us to forget all that. I'm not surprised. Marxists seem intent on repeating history, not making it. The Anarchist critique of Marxism has been confirmed repeatedly. So has our theory of revolution. Whether it is defending the revolution against White and Red dictatorship in the Ukraine, occupying the factories and fighting fascism in Italy, or the collectives and militias of the Spanish revolution, anarchism has done pretty good for a movement Hearse claims can "never have any effect on anything important politically." But, then again, if that were true Hearse would not have written his essay to begin with.

If you are interested in anarchist ideas and want to see the references for the facts and quotes I present, please visit "An Anarchist FAQ" at www.anarchistfaq.org

Iain McKay

Will the real Marxist please stand up?

“The system we want . . . means the people deciding themselves at local level how to run their cities . . . their communities, and of course their workplaces.” Phil Hearse

“The workers . . . must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also . . . for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority. They must not allow themselves to be misguided by the democratic talk of freedom for the communities, of self-government, etc. . . it must under no circumstances be permitted that every village, every town and every province should put a new obstacle in the path of revolutionary activity, which can proceed with full force only from the centre.”
Marx (1850)

“The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association of federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.”
Bakunin

“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.” Lenin (1918)

“the land, the instruments of work and all other capital may become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, on other words, by the agricultural and industrial associations.”
Bakunin

“What counts is . . . the workers taking power through their own organisations.” Phil Hearse

“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.” Trotsky (1937)

“For, the anarchists declared, if ‘power’ really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.” Voline

“Since revolution everywhere must be created by the people and supreme control must always belong to the people organised in a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.” Bakunin

“For us all democracy is representative. It means the delegation of decision making powers . . . [to] elected leadership bodies.” Phil Hearse

“We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. . . In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.” Trotsky (1920)

“By popular government [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people. . . government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority . . . who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will . . . begin to look upon the whole workers’ world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people . . . Liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.” Bakunin

“In fact delegation . . . is a precondition for all democratic politics; it does not imply a delegation of overall social and political power by the working class.” Phil Hearse

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 elected with non-Bolshevik majorities before the civil war started in 1918: they were disbanded. For during the labour disturbances in late 1920 and early 1921 (after the end of the civil war) they provided an effective platform for criticism of the party. 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.

masses themselves.” Lenin (1920)

“Every state power, every government, by its nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organisation and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people.”
Bakunin

“the State cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own internal enemies, against the discontent of its own people.” Bakunin

“The anarchists can’t answer one crucial question. On day one of the revolution, the workers in power will face many enemies . . . Revolution . . . would require our own bodies of armed people — workers’ militias, nationally coordinated.” Phil Hearse

“Immediately after established governments have been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . . . In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary to radiate revolution outward, to raise all of its neighbouring communes in revolt . . . and to federate with them for common defence.” Bakunin

“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.” Trotsky (1939)

“[Anarchists] do not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.” Bakunin

“a state . . . based on the self-organised power of the workers . . . [with] state institutions — notably a government and government ministries.” Phil Hearse

“Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the