

# Black Flag

FOR ANARCHIST

RESISTANCE

## Anti-Capitalism or State Capitalism?

These are exciting but dangerous times. On the one hand, a vigorous new movement seems to be emerging which combines politics with a sense of imagination, one which is often explicitly anti-capitalist. On the other, the forces of reaction appear to be making inroads across Europe. Capitalism in its most naked form, neo-liberalism, is rampant.

In such times, it is understandable that many say we must "unite" against them and so any criticism of each other's politics is "sectarian." Anarchists feel that such arguments are wrong (strangely, some who stress this need for "unity" have also criticised the politics and activities of other activists, often dishonestly<sup>1</sup>). To bury our differences in such a manner simply leads to mindless activism, action without understanding and, ultimately, the weakening of the struggle for freedom and equality. We argue that we need to learn the lessons of history in order not to repeat the same mistakes again.

Ironically, it is usually those who stress the role of their own party as the "memory of the working class," who talk the loudest about the "need for theory" and the "need to study history" who are also at the forefront of urging such "unity." This is not

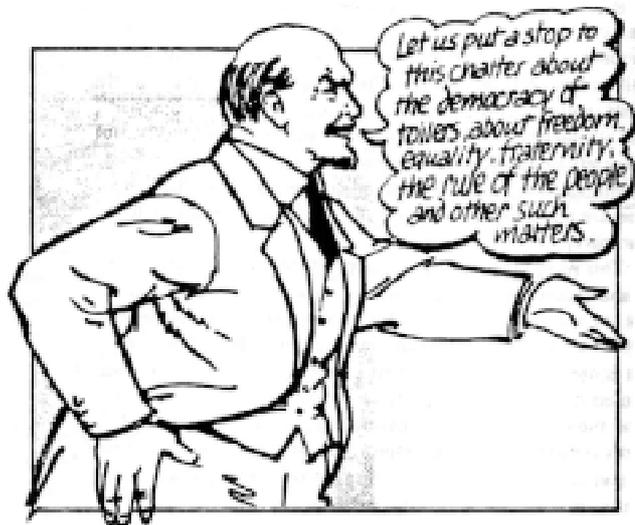
surprising, as it is precisely those parties (the would-be Bolsheviks) who have most to hide and most to lose if their forefather's ideas and activities be unearthed and explained by those with a coherent and libertarian alternative.

Many people are creating their own alternatives, many more are looking for one. Our leaflet is a contribution to that process. Some may dismiss our leaflet as irrelevant or sectarian. That is their loss. Hopefully, it

will help create a movement which, by understanding and rejecting the failures of the past, can build a positive, constructive and truly anti-capitalist movement which can change the world for the better.

New Movements, Old Ideologies  
When the anti-capitalist movement appeared, the old left was taken aback. London's J18 "Carnival Against Capitalism" saw the traditional "revolutionary"

parties almost completely absent. In America, the Seattle demos likewise caught the various "vanguards" unprepared. Since then, they have sought to catch up. As with



capitalist movement." Another, Julie Waterson, knows precisely what they want out of it: "A cadre of Bolsheviks."

Given that the SWP and the various other

"revolutionary" parties seek to recreate the Bolshevik experience, the questions obviously arise: what is Bolshevism and is it anti-capitalist? To

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At the dawn of the 21st century, let us ensure history does not repeat itself. This means rejecting the state capitalism of Bolshevism in favour of a real anti-capitalism

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almost every revolution or mass struggle, we should note.

Are they aiming to join with this movement in order to learn from it, to contribute to its development as equals? No, far from it. Looking at the Socialist Workers Party, for example, we discover a somewhat different perspective. Chris Bambray, a leading member, puts their aim clearly enough: "The test for the SWP will be how it shapes and directs the anti-

answer that, we need to understand what capitalism is and then discuss what the leaders of Bolshevism aimed to create.

What is Capitalism?

For some, capitalism is "the market" or "private property." This perspective is flawed. As anarchists have long argued, capitalism is defined by a specific social relationship, that of wage labour. Capitalism is marked by a mass of people who do not

A Contribution to the development of the Anti-Capitalist Movement.

own their own means of production and, therefore, "the worker sells his person and his liberty for a given time" and so "concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of voluntary and transitory serfdom."<sup>2</sup> For this reason anarchists have called capitalism "wage slavery."

The employment contract must create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker. When the worker allegedly sells her labour power, she in fact sells command over the use of her body and herself. Workers are paid to obey. This means that wage slavery is not a consequence of exploitation, exploitation results from the worker's subordination. The capitalist is the master, he determines how the labour of the worker will be used and so can engage in exploitation. This explains why the anarchist Proudhon argued in *What is Property?* that it was "theft" and "despotism."

Capitalism, therefore, is marked by wage labour. If the means of production are managed by some group other than the direct producers then we have capitalism, regardless of who owns them. Unless the relations of production are revolutionised, the means of production can change hands (passing, for example, from private to state hands) without fundamentally changing the nature of society. Whatever the formal status of property, capitalism will still exist if workers are separated from the means of production and do not manage them directly.

#### Socialism or State Capitalism?

So what did the Bolsheviks aim to create in Russia? Lenin was clear, state capitalism. He argued this before and after the Bolsheviks seized power. For example, in 1917, he argued that "given a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism!" He stressed that "socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly . . . socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly."<sup>3</sup>

The Bolshevik road to "socialism" ran through the terrain of state capitalism and, in fact, simply built upon its institutionalised means of allocating resources and structuring industry. As Lenin put it, "the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connections with the banks and syndicates, an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work . . . This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrestled from the control of the capitalists," it "must be subordinated to the proletarian Soviets" and "it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide." This meant that the Bolsheviks would "not invent the organisational form of work, but take it ready-made from capitalism" and "borrow the best models furnished by the advanced countries."<sup>4</sup>



While most in the anti-capitalist movement are inspired by a vision of a non-capitalist, decentralised, diverse society based on appropriate technology and appropriate scale, Bolshevism is not. Rather, it sees the problem with capitalism is that its institutions are not centralised and big enough.

Once in power, Lenin implemented this vision of socialism being built upon the institutions created by monopoly capitalism. This was not gone accidentally or because no alternative existed. As one historian notes: "On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committees leaders sought to bring their model [of workers' self-management of the economy] into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The Bolshevik alternative was to vest both managerial and control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."<sup>5</sup>

Rather than base socialist reconstruction on working class self-organisation from below, the Bolsheviks started "to build, from the top, its 'unified administration'" based on central bodies created by the Tsarist government in 1915 and 1916.<sup>6</sup> The institutional framework of capitalism would be utilised as the principal (almost exclusive) instruments of "socialist" transformation. "Without big banks Socialism would be impossible," argued Lenin, as they "are the 'state apparatus' which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. A single State Bank, the biggest of the big . . . will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods." While this is "not fully a state apparatus under capitalism," it "will be so with us, under socialism." For Lenin, building socialism was easy. This "nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus" would be created "at one stroke, by a single decree."<sup>7</sup>

#### Workers' Control or Controlled Workers?

It will be argued that Lenin advocated "workers' control." This is true, but a "workers' control" of a very limited nature. Rather than seeing "workers' control" as workers managing production directly, he always saw it in terms of workers' "controlling" those who did. It simply meant "the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious accounting of the production and distribution

of goods." In other words, "over the capitalists" who would still manage production. Over time, this would "to the second step towards socialism, i.e. to pass on to workers' regulation of production."<sup>8</sup>

This is not all, this "workers' control" was always placed in a statist context. In May 1917, Lenin was arguing for the "establishment of state control over all banks, and their amalgamation into a single central bank; also control over the insurance agencies and big capitalist syndicates." He reiterated this framework later that year, arguing that "the new means of control have been created not by us, but by capitalism in its military-imperialist stage" and so "the proletariat takes its weapons from capitalism and does not 'invent' or 'create' them out of nothing."<sup>9</sup> Thus "workers' control" would be exercised not by workers' organisations but rather by state capitalist institutions.

Once in power, the Bolsheviks implemented their version of workers' control and attacked other interpretations: "Accusations of 'anarcho-syndicalism' have always come in Russia from anti-worker, right-wing elements," one railroad committee spokesman put it, "how very strange that representatives of Bolshevik power now join in similar denunciations."<sup>10</sup> The factory committees were hindered in their attempts to federate together and finally merged with the trade unions, bringing them under state control.

Lenin soon turned away from this limited vision of workers' control and raised the idea of "one-man management." This involved granting state appointed "individual executives dictatorial powers (or 'unlimited' powers)." Large-scale industry ("the foundation of socialism") required "thousands subordinating their will to the will of one," and so the revolution "demands" that "the people unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour." Lenin's "superior forms of labour discipline" are simply hyper-developed capitalist forms. The role of workers in production was the same, but with a novel twist, namely "unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during the work."<sup>11</sup>

This support for wage slavery was combined with support for capitalist management techniques. "We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice," argued Lenin, "we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out."<sup>12</sup> Techniques designed and used by management to break the collective power of workers at the point of production were now considered somehow "neutral" when imposed by the Party.

#### The Civil War

It will be objected that we have not discussed the Civil War, which erupted in late May 1918 and exhausted an already weakened society. For most modern day supporters of Bolshevism, this event is used to justify and

rationalise Bolshevik practice. And we agree. We have not discussed it, for the good reason that the policies we have documented are from before it started. It is difficult to blame an event which had not yet begun for the state capitalist policies applied by the Bolsheviks.

The start of the civil war merely accelerated these policies. With "workers' control" of capitalists a failure and pressure and opposition from the workers rising, the Bolsheviks nationalised large-scale industry as a defence against both classes. But the vision of socialism based on "one-man" management continued, with Trotsky noting that "if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, "the apogee of the War Communism economy occurred after the Civil War was effectively over" because "in early 1920 the Communist Party leadership was no longer distracted by [it] from concentrating its thoughts and efforts on the formulation and implementation of its labour policies."<sup>14</sup> By the end of that year, nearly 90% of factories were under one-man management.

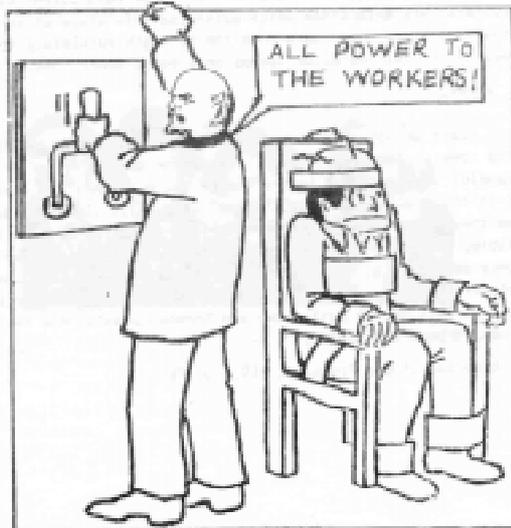
Trotsky also discussed his ideas on "the organisation of labour" in the "new society." This was based on the "militarisation of labour" under "one-man management," treating "the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power" and with the unions role to "discipline the workers and teach them to place the needs of production above their own needs and demands." This was "correct from the point of view of both principle and of practice" to overcome "economic difficulties."<sup>15</sup> With full party leadership backing, he applied his ideas on the railway workers in September 1920. His top-down rule helped to cause the disastrous collapse of the railway network in the winter of 1920-1. Faced with increasing working class protest, the party leadership dissociated itself with the "militarisation of labour" in November, 1920.

### Big is Beautiful

In summary, the Bolshevik tradition is based on utilising the organisational structures of capitalism and making them bigger and more centralised rather than creating alternative, socialist, ones. It would use the same management techniques (such as Taylorism) and management structures (such as "one-man management"). The only difference is the means of production and any profit generated will be owned by the state. This, as anarchists argued, was no difference at all:

"The nationalisation of industry, removing the workers from the hands of individual capitalists, delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single, ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital, with the sole difference that the Communist boss, the State, not only exploits the workers, but also punishes them himself. . . . Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State. . . . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism."<sup>16</sup>

While most in the anti-capitalist movement are inspired by a vision of a non-capitalist, decentralised, diverse society based on appropriate technology and appropriate scale, Bolshevism is not. Rather, it sees the problem with capitalism is that its institutions are not centralised and big enough. Hence Lenin: "All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state. . . . All citizens become employees and workers of a single country-wide state 'syndicate'. . . . The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay."<sup>17</sup> Given that Engels had argued against the anarchists that a factory required subordination, authority, lack of freedom and "a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation,"



Lenin's idea of turning the world into one big factory takes on an extremely frightening aspect.<sup>18</sup> As anarchist Alexander Berkman correctly argued in 1927:

"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated. . . . Most people are still in the thralldom of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class."<sup>19</sup>

That Bolshevism is soaked in capitalist ideology can be seen from Lenin's comments that when "the separate establishments are amalgamated into a single syndicate, this economy can attain tremendous proportions, as economic science teaches us."<sup>20</sup> Yes, capitalist economic science, based on capitalist definitions of efficiency and economy! That Bolshevism bases itself on centralised, large scale industry because it is more "efficient" and "economic" suggests nothing less than that its "socialism" will be based on the same priorities of capitalism. This can be seen from Lenin's idea that Russia had to learn from the advanced capitalist countries, that there was only one way to develop production and that

was by adopting capitalist methods of "rationalisation" and management.

### An alternative vision

The idea that socialism may have different priorities, need different methods of organising production, have different visions of how an economy was structured than capitalism, is absent in Bolshevism. Lenin thought that the institutions of bourgeois economic power, industrial structure and capitalist technology and techniques could be "captured" and used for other ends. Ultimately, though, capitalist means and organisations can only generate capitalist ends. It is significant that the "one-man management," piece-work, Taylorism, etc. advocated and implemented under Lenin are listed by his followers as evils of Stalinism and as proof of its anti-socialist nature. Clearly, Bolshevik policies had a decisive impact on how the revolution developed.

However, there is another vision of socialism. This alternative vision existed in Russia at the time, a vision which the Bolsheviks had to crush by state action. This vision has anarchism as its leading proponent.

Aspects of this vision were being created during the Russian Revolution. While Lenin was arguing for "workers' control," across Russia workers had created factory committees, federated them together, organised conferences and raised the idea of workers' self-management of production and started to implement it. In the Ukraine, the Makhnovist anarchist insurgents fought for free soviets and workers' and peasant self-management against both White and Red dictatorship. Unfortunately, Lenin's state capitalism prevailed, undermining the factory committees, crushing the anarchists and betraying the Makhnovists.

At the dawn of the 21st century, let us ensure history does not repeat itself. This means rejecting the state capitalism of Bolshevism in favour of a real anti-capitalism, one rooted in working class struggle, self-organisation, solidarity, direct action and self-liberation. One which does not aim to replace the old boss with a new one.

### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the leaflet "The SWP's very peculiar anarchism" in reply to Pat Stack's article "Anarchy in the UK?" in Socialist Review available at <http://struggle.ws/pdf/leaflets.html>

<sup>2</sup> Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, p. 187

<sup>3</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 211

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365 and p. 369

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia*, p. 38

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, p. 36

<sup>7</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 365

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 364-5 and p. 366

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112, p. 367 and p. 599

<sup>10</sup> quoted, Daniel H. Kaiser (ed.), *The Workers Revolution in Russia, 1917*, pp. 116-7

<sup>11</sup> Lenin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 610, p. 611, p. 612

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 602-3

<sup>13</sup> quoted by M. Brinton, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 66-7

<sup>14</sup> J. Aves, *Workers Against Lenin*, p. 17

<sup>15</sup> quoted by M. Brinton, *Op. Cit.*, p. 66

<sup>16</sup> Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement*, p. 71

<sup>17</sup> Lenin, *Ibid.*, p. 312

<sup>18</sup> Marx-Engels Reader, p. 731

<sup>19</sup> *The ABC of Anarchism*, pp. 80-1

<sup>20</sup> Lenin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 200

**Bolshevism is soaked in capitalist ideology**

# Socialism or Statism?

Kropotkin argued that every "new economic phase demands a new political phase." This meant "if we want the social revolution, we must seek a form of political organisation that will correspond to the new method of economic organisation. . . . The future belongs to the free groupings of interests and not to governmental centralisation; it belongs to freedom and not to authority."<sup>1</sup>

This applies to Bolshevism as well. Given that it was whole-heartedly state capitalist in both aims and practice, what political system did it implement? If asked about this, followers of Bolshevism will point to Lenin's State and Revolution. Anarchists, however, agree with Marx when he said that we cannot judge people by what they say, but by what they do. Lenin

promised a radical democracy, one which had many similarities to anarchist ideas. However, he combined these libertarian socialist elements with more typically statist ones. Lenin argued that "by educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat, capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism." Is it the party or the proletariat which takes power? His comment about "the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class" suggest the former.<sup>2</sup>

This is confirmed from other works written in 1917. Lenin stressed that the Bolsheviks would "take over full state power," that they "can and must take state power into their own hands." The role of the working class was that of voters. Hence the first task was "to convince the majority of the people that its programme and tactics are correct." The second task "that confronted our Party was to capture political power." The third task was for "the Bolshevik Party" to "administer Russia."<sup>3</sup> The idea that socialism involved direct working class self-management of society is missing, replaced by the equation of party power with class power.

As anarchists have long argued, the state "is the minority government, from the top downward."<sup>4</sup> It is the delegation and centralisation of power into the hands of a few. Centralism was designed for minority rule and to exclude the mass of

people from taking part in decision-making processes in society: "To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution.

That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

If Bolshevism is capitalist in economics, we would expect it to be capitalist in politics as well. This means that it will favour "centralism" and "strong state power," which it did.<sup>6</sup> Power was quickly centralised in the hands of the Council of People's Commissars. Four days after seizing power, it "unilaterally arrogated to itself legislative power simply by

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This is Bolshevism's central fallacy, it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — designed to preclude that participation.

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promulgating a decree to this effect. This was, effectively, a Bolshevik coup d'etat that made clear the government's (and party's) pre-eminence over the soviets and their executive organ. Increasingly, the Bolsheviks relied upon the appointment from above of commissars with plenipotentiary powers, and they split up and reconstituted fractious Soviets and intimidated political opponents."<sup>7</sup> This is Bolshevism's central fallacy, it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — designed to preclude that participation.

So what happens when the workers reject the vanguard? Simple, the vanguard rejects (and represses) the workers. In response to the "great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections" during the spring and summer of 1918 "Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections." In Petrograd, the government "continually postponed the new general elections" and called them only after it packed the soviet with representatives from organisations it controlled. This ensured its majority, making the direct elections from the workplace irrelevant.<sup>8</sup>



## Party Dictatorship

Once the civil war started, Bolshevik authoritarianism accelerated. Leading Bolsheviks started to argue that party dictatorship was inevitable in every revolution. While still praising "soviet democracy" as the highest ever, Lenin admitted in mid-1919 that "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 . . .'" The next year, he generalised this lesson: "the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded,

and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard."<sup>9</sup>

Trotsky agreed, arguing in 1920 that "it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party."<sup>10</sup> The following year he stated that you cannot "place the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy." The party was "obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes."<sup>11</sup>

1923 saw Trotsky admitting "if there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party."<sup>12</sup> In 1927, he was talking about 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."<sup>13</sup> Ten years later, he continued

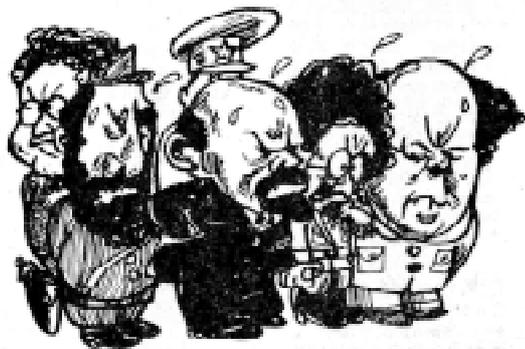
this theme, arguing that the "revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party" was "an objective necessity" imposed, in part, by "the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class." He dismissed the idea that "the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party" and stated that the "revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution."<sup>14</sup> He even repeated his old argument from 1920 that "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." All in all, "the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard" and a "revolutionary party, even having seized power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."<sup>15</sup> Note, the party is "the sovereign ruler of society," not the working class.

### The Civil War

It will be argued that the Civil War explains all this. Ignoring the fact that the Bolsheviks had undermined soviet democracy before it started, this "explanation" is question begging. After all, those who argue this are meant to understand that "a socialist revolution . . . is inconceivable without internal war, i.e. civil war, which is even more devastating than external war." Equally, the idea that the Russian Revolution would have succeeded if it had spread to Germany is also flawed. Germany was in a state of economic collapse at the time and, as Lenin argued, the revolution there "will be a hundred times more devastating and ruinous" because "state capitalism prevails" and so "there will be gigantic difficulties and tremendous chaos and imbalance."<sup>16</sup> As such, it seems incredulous that modern day Bolsheviks blame the inevitable results of revolution for the degeneration of the Russian one.

### Socialism from Above

The roots of the problem lies with Bolshevik politics. It rejects the idea of "socialism from below," the idea that socialism can only be constructed from below-upwards by mass participation, based on self-managed organisations.



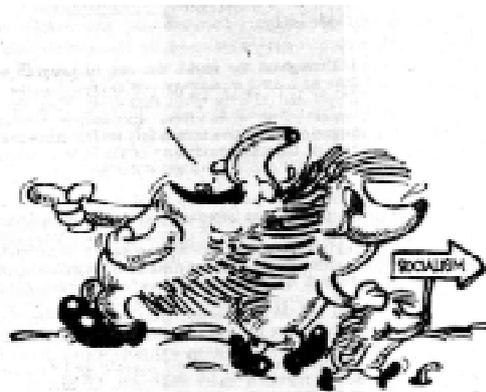
In 1905, Lenin argued that "limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism." He stressed the importance combining "from above" and "from below," where "pressure from above" was "pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens."<sup>17</sup> He went so far to state that the "organisational principle" of Bolshevism was "centralism" and "to proceed from the top downward."<sup>18</sup> The implications of this became clear once the Bolsheviks seized power. As Lenin explained to his political police, the Cheka: "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 masses themselves."<sup>19</sup> Of course, "wavering" and "unstable" elements is just another way of saying "pressure from below," the attempts by those subject to the "revolutionary" government to influence its policies.

Bolshevism confuses party power with workers power. For Lenin, it was "evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind" to ask the question "dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class?" and it was "ridiculously absurd and stupid" to "draw a contrast . . . between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders," The "correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks" lies in "correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power."<sup>20</sup> Note, the vanguard (the party) seizes power, not the masses. He also indicated the "top-down" nature of Bolshevik rule in 1920:

"The interrelations between leaders-Party-class-masses . . . now present themselves concretely in Russia in the following form. The dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat which is organised in the Soviets and is led by the Communist Party . . . The Party, which holds annual congresses . . . is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow had to be carried on by [two] still smaller bodies . . . which are elected at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee in each bureau. This, then, looks like a real 'oligarchy.' Not a single important political or organisational question is decided by any State institution in our republic [sic!] without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party.

"In its work the Party relies directly on the trade unions . . . In reality, all the controlling bodies of the overwhelming majority of the unions . . . consists of Communists, who secure the carrying out of all the instructions of the Party. Thus . . . we have a . . . very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the class and with the masses, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the class dictatorship of the class is realised."<sup>21</sup>

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."<sup>22</sup>



Perhaps this explains why he did not bother to view "proletarian" state power "from below," from the viewpoint of the proletariat? If he did, perhaps he would have recounted the numerous strikes and protests broken by the Army and Cheka under martial law, the gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets, the imposition of "one-man management" in

production, the turning of the unions into agents of the state/party and the elimination of working class freedom by party power. After all, if the congresses of soviets were "more democratic" than anything in the "best democratic republics of the bourgeois world," the Bolsheviks would have no need for non-Party conferences "to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands."<sup>23</sup> How the Bolsheviks "responded" to these conferences and their demands is extremely significant. They stopped them. This was because "during the disturbances" of late 1920, "they provided an effective platform for criticism of Bolshevik policies and their frequency decreased." They "were discontinued soon afterward."<sup>24</sup>

### Got No Class?

While Lenin obviously has no problem with this system of party rule, many of his followers justify it in terms of the decimation of the working class that occurred during the civil war. This meant, it

is argued, that of necessity the Soviet institutions took on a life independently of the class they had arisen from.

The major problem with this kind of assertion is simply that the Russian working class was more than capable of collective action throughout the Civil War period — against the Bolsheviks. In the Moscow area, while it is “impossible to say what proportion of workers were involved in the various disturbances,” following the lull after the defeat of the workers’ conference movement in mid-1918 “each wave of unrest was more powerful than the last, culminating in the mass movement from late 1920.” At the end of June 1919, “a Moscow committee of defence (KOM) was formed to deal with the rising tide of disturbances . . . KOM concentrated emergency power in its hands, overriding the Moscow Soviet, and demanding obedience from the population. The disturbances died down under the pressure of repression.” In early 1921, “military units called in” against striking workers “refused to open fire, and they were replaced by the armed communist detachments” who did. “The following day several factories went on strike” and troops “disarmed and locked in as a precaution” by the government against possible fraternising. On February 23rd, “Moscow was placed under martial law with a 24-hour watch on factories by the communist detachments and trustworthy army units.”<sup>25</sup>

Nor was this collective struggle limited to Moscow. “Strike action remained endemic in the first nine months of 1920” and “in the first six months of 1920 strikes had occurred in seventy-seven per cent of middle-sized and large works.” For the Petrograd province, soviet figures state that in 1919 65,625 workers took part in strikes and in 1920 there were 85,645, both significant numbers as according to one set of figures, which are by no means the lowest, there were 109,100 workers there. In February and March 1921 “industrial unrest broke out in a nation-wide wave of discontent . . . General strikes, or very widespread unrest, hit Petrograd, Moscow, Saratov and Ekaterinoslavl.” Only one major industrial region was unaffected. In response to the general strike in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks replied with a “military clamp-down, mass arrests and other coercive measures, such as the closure of enterprises, the purging of the workforce and stopping of rations which accompanied them.”<sup>26</sup>

It was Lenin who first raised the idea of a disappeared working class. He did so “to justify a political clamp-down.” Indeed, this argument was developed in response to rising working class protest rather than its lack: “As discontent amongst workers became more and more difficult to ignore, Lenin . . . began to argue that the consciousness of the working class had deteriorated . . . workers had become ‘declassed.’” However, there “is little evidence to suggest that the demands that workers made at the end of 1920 . . . represented a fundamental change in aspirations since 1917.”<sup>27</sup> So while the “

working class had decreased in size and changed in composition, . . . the protest movement from late 1920 made clear that it was not a negligible force and that in an inchoate way it retained a vision of socialism which was not identified entirely with Bolshevik power . . . Lenin’s arguments on the declassing of the proletariat was more a way of avoiding this unpleasant truth than a real reflection of what remained, in Moscow at least, a substantial physical and ideological force.”<sup>28</sup>

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## Ironically, but not unexpectedly, Bolshevism’s only “victory” ended up providing empirical evidence in support of Bakunin’s critiques and predictions about Marxism.

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Clearly, the idea that purely “objective factors” can explain the degeneration of the Revolution is wrong. Bolshevik ideology itself played a key role in the development of the revolution.

### An Unexpected Development?

Therefore, when Leninists argue that they stand for the “principles of socialism from below” and state that this means the “direct and democratic control of society by the working class” then, clearly, they are being less than honest. After all, “there is no evidence indicating that Lenin or any of the mainstream Bolshevik leaders lamented the loss of workers’ control or of democracy in the soviets, or at least referred to these losses as a retreat, as Lenin declared with the replacement of War Communism by NEP in 1921.”<sup>29</sup> Looking at the Bolshevik tradition, the obvious conclusion which must be reached is that Leninism is not based on “socialism from below” in the sense of working class self-management of society (i.e. the only condition when the majority can “rule” and decisions truly flow from below upwards). At best, they subscribe to the distinctly bourgeois vision of “democracy” as being simply the majority designating (and trying to control) its rulers. At worse, Bolshevism preaches party dictatorship.

The development of Bolshevism from party rule to party dictatorship did not come as a surprise to anarchists. As Bakunin predicted, “by popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. . . [That is,] government of the

vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of former workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and 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.”<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, but not unexpectedly, Bolshevism’s only “victory” ended up providing empirical evidence in support of Bakunin’s critiques and predictions about Marxism. The Bolshevik revolution quickly became the dictatorship over the proletariat, as he predicted. The fate of Social Democracy also vindicated his analysis, becoming as reformist as he predicted due to its electioneering. With “victories” like these, Marxists do not need defeats! Perhaps it is time to consider anarchism, the real socialism from below?

### (Endnotes)

- <sup>1</sup> Words of a Rebel, pp. 143-4
- <sup>2</sup> Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 255 and p. 302
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 352, p. 328 and p. 589
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 265]
- <sup>5</sup> Kropotkin, Words of a Rebel, p. 143
- <sup>6</sup> Lenin, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 374
- <sup>7</sup> Neil Harding, Leninism, p. 253
- <sup>8</sup> Samuel Farber, Before Stalinism, pp. 23-4 and p. 22, p. 33
- <sup>9</sup> Collected Works, vol. 29, p. 535; Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21
- <sup>10</sup> Communism and Terrorism, p. 108
- <sup>11</sup> quoted by Samuel Farber, Before Stalinism, p. 209
- <sup>12</sup> Leon Trotsky Speaks, p. 158
- <sup>13</sup> The Platform of the Opposition, p. 62
- <sup>14</sup> Writings 1936-37, pp. 513-4
- <sup>15</sup> “Stalinism and Bolshevism”, Socialist Review, no. 146, p. 18 and p. 16
- <sup>16</sup> Lenin, Op. Cit., p. 607; Collected Works, vol. 27, p. 298
- <sup>17</sup> Marx, Engels and Lenin, Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 196 and pp. 189-90
- <sup>18</sup> Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 7, pp. 396-7
- <sup>19</sup> Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 42, p. 170
- <sup>20</sup> Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, p. 25, p. 35 and p. 27
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-2
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 33
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 33 and p. 32
- <sup>24</sup> Richard Sakwa, Soviet Communists in Power, p. 203
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 94 and pp. 94-5 p. 245
- <sup>26</sup> J. Aves, Workers Against Lenin, p. 69, p. 109, p. 120
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 18, p. 90 and p. 91.
- <sup>28</sup> Sakwa, Op. Cit., p. 261
- <sup>29</sup> Farber, Op. Cit., p. 44
- <sup>30</sup> Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy, p. 178

For more anarchist critiques of Marxism visit:  
<http://www.infoshop.org/texts/iso.html>  
<http://www.infoshop.org/faq/secHcon.html>  
<http://www.infoshop.org/faq/append3.html>

country — so as to bring the factory amidst the fields . . . agriculture . . . combined with industry . . . to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work." In this decentralised, federated communal society, "the workers" would be "the real managers of industries," and there would be "countless variety of workshops and factories which are required to satisfy the infinite diversity of taste." The future workplace will be "airy and hygienic, and consequently economical, . . . in which human life is of more account than machinery and the making of extra profits." The "machine will supersede hand-work in the manufacture of plain goods. But at the same time, hand-work very probably will extend its domain in the artistic finishing of many things which are now made entirely in the factory." <sup>6</sup> Production would serve all the needs of people, not vice versa.

Anarchism is based on critical evaluation of technology, rejecting the whole capitalist notion of "progress" which has always been part of justifying the inhumanities of the status quo. Just because something is rewarded by capitalism it does not mean that it makes sense from a human or ecological perspective. This informs our vision of a free society and the current struggle.

We have long argued that that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In our battle to democratise and socialise the workplace, in our awareness of the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming their work situation, we show that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute.

Such a society will take time to create. Anarchists "do not believe that in any country the Revolution will be accomplished at a stroke, in the twinkling of an eye, as some socialists dream." <sup>7</sup> By applying our ideas today, we will be helped to make this revolution deeper and more successful when it occurs. The Spanish Revolution of 1936 proves this, with years of anarchist organising and struggle ensuring the deepest social transformation the world has yet seen and creating a firm foundation for future progress.

Building the future in the present!

As history shows, to get real change we have to impose from the streets and workplaces that which politicians are incapable of realising in parliament and anarchists organise accordingly. We argue that the working class "must organise their powers apart from and against the State," by building "the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and

villages." <sup>8</sup> This means encouraging direct action, solidarity and community and workplace assemblies in the struggle for improvements under capitalism. By "combining theory and practice" and organising in this way we build "the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world," so creating "not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself." <sup>9</sup>

In organising resistance in the workplace and community we can create a network of activists and groups which can encourage a spirit of revolt and resistance. By creating assemblies where we live and work we can create an effective countering power to the state and capital. We must create that part of libertarian socialism which can be created within bourgeois society in order to combat that society with our own special weapons. These combative working class organisations can also be the focal point for creating co-operatives, credit unions, self-managed schools, social centres and so on.

As soon as people learn to rely upon themselves they will act for themselves. People must place their faith in themselves, not leaders. We urge them to form their own organisations, to repudiate their bosses, to despise the state. We encourage self-activity, self-organisation and self-help. The "sole means of opposing the reactionary forces of the state" is the "organising of the revolutionary force of the people." The revolution builds on this and is "the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs . . . from below upward, by the people themselves . . . [in] a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations." <sup>10</sup>

To not act because of the possibility of failure is to live half a life. Anarchism calls upon everyone to live the kind of life they deserve as unique individuals and desire as human beings. Individually we can make a difference, together we can change the world.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> The Unknown Revolution, p. 197

<sup>2</sup> The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 314

<sup>3</sup> Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170-2

<sup>4</sup> Proudhon, The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 97-8 and pp. 215-6

<sup>5</sup> Bakunin, The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 410; No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 176

<sup>6</sup> Kropotkin, Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow, pp. 157-8, p. 197 and pp. 151-2

<sup>7</sup> Kropotkin, The Conquest of Bread, p. 81

<sup>8</sup> The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 376 and p. 300

<sup>9</sup> Bakunin, quoted by Rocker, Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 45

<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy, p. 156 and p. 33

## Does it matter?

Some will dismiss our leaflet by saying that it is "old news," that "lessons have been learned" and so on. This does not stop them praising the Bolshevik revolution and urging us to repeat it! Nor does it stop them justifying and rationalising Bolshevik actions, so creating the atmosphere in which such actions will be repeated. Nor does it stop them using the same slogans as before, such as "nationalisation under workers' control," a "workers' government" and so on.

The question is, can libertarian socialist ideas be grafted onto a different conceptual framework? And if so, is it to say anything new or to preserve something old with ideological formaldehyde? Does it represent a real change or simply the appropriation of libertarian socialist rhetoric to hide an authoritarian ideology?

This is not some academic point. The ramifications of Bolshevism appropriating such ideas (or, more correctly, the rhetoric associated with those ideas) has had negative impacts on actual revolutionary movements.

Lenin's definition of "workers' control" is a case in point. As with the ideas of the current anti-capitalist movement, the "factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May [1917] that the party began to take it up." However, Lenin used "the term in a very different sense from that of the factory committees." In fact his "proposals . . . [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous." <sup>1</sup> However, the similarities in rhetoric allowed the factory committee movement to put its weight behind the Bolsheviks. Once in power, Lenin's position was implemented while that of the factory committees was ignored (indeed, one Bolshevik resolution complained that "the workers misunderstand and falsely interpret workers' control." <sup>2</sup>).

## Anarchist Webpages

[www.anarchistfaq.org](http://www.anarchistfaq.org)

[www.ainfos.ca](http://www.ainfos.ca)

[www.infoshop.org](http://www.infoshop.org)

[www.struggle.ws](http://www.struggle.ws)

Or take the slogan "All power to the Soviets." For anarchists it meant exactly that — organs for the working class to run society directly, based on mandated, recallable delegates. As such, this slogan fitted perfectly with our ideas, as anarchists had been arguing since the 1860's that such workers' councils were both a weapon of class struggle against capitalism and the framework of the future libertarian society. For the Bolsheviks, that slogan was simply the means for a Bolshevik government to be formed over and above the soviets. The difference is important, "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." <sup>3</sup> Reducing the soviets to simply executing the decrees of the central (Bolshevik) government and having their All-Russian Congress be able to recall the government (i.e. those with real power) does not equal "all power," quite the reverse — the soviets were simply a fig-leaf for party power.

So when someone says that they, too, are "anti-capitalist" we cannot assume we mean the same thing. As the history of Bolshevism shows, a hostility to private capitalism can hide support for state capitalism and the same slogans can mean different things. And if the Russian Revolution teaches us anything, it teaches us that history does matter and that libertarian slogans can be used as a cover by authoritarians to further their plans. Let us ensure that "anti-capitalism" does not suffer that fate.

(Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> S.A. Smith, Red Petrograd, p. 154

<sup>2</sup> quoted by M. Brinton, The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, p. 32

<sup>3</sup> Voline, The Unknown Revolution, p. 213

# For a real anti-capitalism!

Our account of past struggles is not simply a history lesson. Nor is it an attempt to mire the current struggle and movement in past controversies. Rather it is an attempt to contribute to a movement which must look to the future. To do so, we must understand the past in order to avoid repeating previous mistakes and dead-ends. To move forward we must reject those ideologies which failed in the past but which linger on like the undead in our midst.

We are extremely happy that many in the current anti-globalisation movement have embraced anarchist ideas and practice and that our ideas obviously appeal to activists and meet their needs. If anarchism is gaining influence it is because the activists are themselves drawing similar conclusions from their own experiences and analyses. A new generation of activists are developing their

own theories based on a critical dialogue with previous revolutionary ideas and their own experiences. This is an extremely positive sign. We have a lot in common and can learn from each other.

What is anarchism? Anarchism is one of the most misrepresented ideas around. The media tries to portray it as mindless violence, as chaos. The "revolutionary" left paints a different, but equally false, picture. Some claim that we reject collective class struggle, are "backward looking," that we think that the state is the main enemy, that we think that ruling class will disappear without a fight, and other such nonsense. The truth is different.

"The basic idea of Anarchism is simple," argued Voline, "no party . . . placed above or outside the labouring masses . . . ever succeeds in emancipating them . . . Effective emancipation can only be achieved by the direct, widespread, and independent action of those concerned, of the workers themselves, grouped, not under the banner of a political party . . . but in their own class organisations (productive workers' unions, factory committees, co-operatives, et cetera) on the basis of concrete action and self-government."<sup>1</sup>

The seeds of anarchy are created in struggle. By fighting for change, those involved have to organise themselves, to manage their own affairs, to make their own decisions. They can see that bosses and politicians are not needed. The class struggle is the school of anarchism.

Therefore how we organise under capitalism is very important. Anarchists stress building the new world in the shell of the old. We argue for revolutionary groups based on self-management, federalism and decision making from below. We apply within our organisations the same principles which the working class has evolved in the course of its own struggles. Autonomy is combined with federalism, so ensuring co-ordination of decisions and activities is achieved from below upwards by means of mandated and recallable delegates. Effective co-operation is

achieved as it is informed by and reflects the needs on the ground. Simply put, working class organisation and discipline — as exemplified by the workers' council — represents a completely different thing from capitalist organisation and discipline, of which Bolshevism constantly asks for more (albeit draped with the Red Flag and labelled "revolutionary").

## Anti-Statism

Instead of a workers' state (a contradiction in terms) run from the top-down by a "revolutionary" government, anarchists argue for a free federation of working class organisations, "the system of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, i.e. the system of Anarchism. This is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the State and establishment of the economic, entirely free organisation of the people — organisation from bottom to top by means of federation."<sup>2</sup>

This federation of free communes is based on workers' councils ("soviets"), with the "federative Alliance of all working men's associations . . . will constitute the Commune," with the "Communal Council composed of . . . delegates . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates." The "federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces" would "organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . [and for] self-defence." The 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

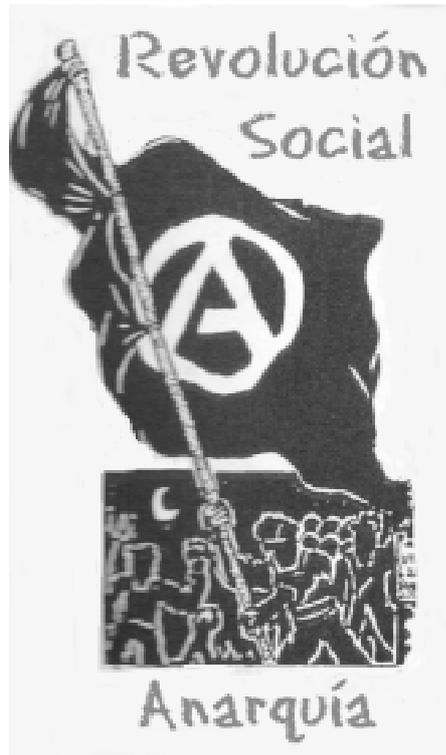
revolutionary delegation. . ."<sup>3</sup>

In other words, a real socialism from below based on federations of workplace and community assemblies, a socialism which is libertarian and which does not equate party power with popular power.

## Anti-capitalism

Anarchism argues that real anti-capitalism has to be based on "worker's associations" as these are "a protest against the wage system" and the "denial of the rule of capitalists." Without these, as Bolshevism showed, people "remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society."<sup>4</sup> In anarchy "capital and all tools of labour belong to the city workers — to the workers associations. The whole organisation of the future should be nothing but a free federation of workers — agricultural workers as well as factory workers and associations of craftsmen." The "future organisation of society must proceed from the bottom up only, through free association or federations of the workers, into their associations to begin with, then into communes, regions, nations and, finally, into a great international and universal federation."<sup>5</sup>

An anarchist society is based on federations of decentralised communities in which production would be based on the "scattering of industries over the



## 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.

## Black Flag,

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