

TO BE GOVERNED is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about, by men who have neither the right nor the knowledge nor the virtue.

To be governed means to be, at each transaction, at each movement, noted, registered, taxed, stamped, measured, evaluated, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hampered, reformed, rebuked, arrested.

It is to be, on the pretext of the general interest, drained, drilled, held to ransom, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the least resistance, at the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, abused, annoyed, followed, bullied, beaten, disarmed, garrotted, imprisoned, machine-gunned, judged, condemned, deported, flayed, sold, betrayed, and finally mocked, ridiculed, insulted, dishonored. Such is government, such is justice, such is morality.

—Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

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# THE CRISIS OF SOCIALISM



COLIN WARD

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# The Crisis of Socialism

by

Colin Ward

**W**henever anarchists from different parts of the world meet it is inevitable that they should discuss the failure of anarchism, as a political movement, to win the support of more than almost invisible minorities in most of the populations of the world. The assumption has usually been that one day, somewhere, this situation will change, not in our lifetimes, perhaps, but in that of our children or grandchildren. Maybe, with their dying breath they will be able to say, "Comrades, I can see on the horizon the light of the dawn of the social revolution!" Why not? Revolution is not impossible. We have seen dozens, all through this century, but each has been followed by counterrevolution, with the anarchists among the victims.

The belief in a *lutte finale*, a final struggle, is of course an inheritance from the nineteenth century and was common to most socialist movements of all kinds, whether Marxist, Christian, democratic, syndicalist or anarchist. They all looked for that revolutionary dawn, and of course, in the event, it was not their particular revolutionary dawn. The most disappointed of all must be the Marxists—those scientific socialists who knew that history was on their side—for by now the greater part of the Earth's surface is ruled by governments which declare themselves to be Marxists, and we all know exactly what Marxism is like as a ruling ideology. Even the most credulous believer must see that the ruling elite in the Soviet Union has much more in common with the ruling elite of the United States than it has with its own poor citizens. We are all familiar with the old Polish joke that under capitalism man exploits man, while under socialism it's the other way round.

So while we admit the failure of anarchism, considered as a political movement, how much more remarkable has been the failure of the world's socialist movements to achieve socialist aims, whether we are considering the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the East, or the constitutional electoral versions in the West, or the various parodies of both in the Third World. And if ours has been the century of disappointed ideological hopes, it has also been the century of prophecies fulfilled, so far as the 19th century anarchists are concerned. Proudhon and Bakunin were alone among their contemporaries, with the exception of their mutual friend Alexander Herzen, in forecasting the nature of the twentieth century total state.

There is a famous passage from Bakunin [Reproduced as the latter half of this pamphlet—Ed.] in which he describes with uncanny accuracy the destination of totalitarianism in our own century, both in what he styled its Bismarckian form which reached its apotheosis in Nazi Germany, and in what he styled as Marx's People's State (*Volksstaat*) which led, inevitably, to Stalin's Russia. Marxist theologians draw a distinction between the two because they have a mechanical interpretation of fascism as the response of capitalism to its terminal crisis. They ignore the fact that the Nazi Party was the National Socialist German Worker's Party, with, as the rest of Europe learned to its cost, huge popular support.

There is an equally famous passage from Proudhon [Reproduced on the back cover—Ed.] in which he catalogued the evils of government. How interesting that in his list from 1848 of the horrors of being ruled, Proudhon did not include the use of systematic torture by governments. Nearly a century and a half later, there is not a government in the world which does not sanction the torture of political suspects by its zealous servants.

We have come to accept this as normal, throughout the world. State security is the paramount concern of the modern self-preserving state. But we know too that the state relies on the existence of a "latent external crisis," as Martin Buber called it, in order to retain its ascendancy over its own subjects, and to serve as its ultimate weapon against its own population. I have always been impressed by the aphorism used by Randolph Bourne during the first world war, that "War is the health of the State." and by the conclusion reached in the 1930s by Simone Weil in her *Reflections on War*. She declared that, "The great error of nearly all studies of war, an error into which all socialists have fallen, has been to consider war as an episode in foreign politics, when it is

especially an act of interior politics, and the most atrocious act of all." The war of one State against another State, she concluded, "resolves itself into a war of the State and the military apparatus against its own people."

We have all seen very recently how the Malvinas/Falklands war served as the ideal external crisis for both Colonel Galtieri and for Mrs. Thatcher, and how today the Iran-Iraq war has precisely the same function for both regimes. A major part of the economic activity of the great powers is not only in supplying their own demand for weapons, but in exporting weapons to the minor ones, so that throughout the poor half of the world, governments of military bandits with starving populations, are equipped with incredibly sophisticated and lethal weapons together with the necessary advisers from the USA or the USSR. If anything should convince anyone of the truths of the anarchist critique of government, it is the slightest observation of the actual behavior of the governments of the world.

I am always amazed that now that we have a whole academic industry analyzing the history of anarchism and explaining the errors of the anarchists of the past, the scholars somehow fail to notice that alone among the ideologists of the last century, the anarchists were right about the nature of the modern state.

**R**ecently the editor of an American newsletter, *Peacework*, asked several hundred people their answers to the question "What will it take to prevent nuclear war?" The truest answer, for me, came from Karl Hess. (He is an American advocate of decentralized politics and community technology.)

To the question "What will it take?" he replied:

*A sharp diminution of the power of those who have the power to divert resources to weapons.*

*Nuclear weapons are the result of state power. They are the result of state power. They are the very affirmation of such power in this century. Even the most impoverished state drives relentlessly toward possessing them. It is to the state what a big car is to the status-seeking person. No modern state claims power on any other basis than the possession of such great weapons. None claim to be respected. None boast of the happiness of the people. All boast of their weapons or complain of their lack of them.*

*Thus, I believe, nuclear war is simply another function of state power. The two are intimately related.*

*To use state power to curb such weapons would be to ask the state to surrender its own power. What state would do that? Norway, maybe. Switzerland assuredly. But not the great ones. Nor would the new pretenders to state power, the major terrorist groups, want to step down their power by renouncing the Big Bang. Hardly. They probably lust after it.*

*Nuclear war will be avoided if, and only if, state power itself diminishes...*" (from *What Will it Take to Prevent Nuclear War?*, Pat Farren, Ed.)

It is precisely because the socialist movements of the world have committed themselves to the enlargement of state power, rather than to its diminution, that socialism is in crisis. But why do I address myself to the crisis of socialism rather than to that of anarchism? Because the anarchist movement is not in crisis. It remains just what it always was: a tiny network of propagandists around the world, whose bitterest disputes are internal, but whose general conclusions are far more relevant today than when they were first formulated in the last century.

The anarchists claimed that it was necessary to destroy the power of the state. The socialists claimed that it was necessary to take control of that power. By now, as we have seen, the whole world feels threatened by nuclear weapons which are the ultimate expression of state power. States, whether capitalist or socialist have achieved what every megalomaniac dictator in history has vainly sought: the power to destroy every citizen of every state.

The anarchists claimed that for the liberation of work, it was necessary for industrial production to be in the hands of the producers. The socialists claimed that it should be in the hands of the state. The result is, as we can all see, looking around the world today, that the more the control of industry is concentrated in the hands of the state, the more powerless are the industrial workers. Compare the situation of the industrial worker in the Soviet Union, 69 years after the Bolshevik revolution, with that of the industrial worker in the capitalist West. (This is not to praise capitalism, but to acknowledge that its power has been curbed in ways that were not envisaged by either Marxists or anarchists.) The common factor that links the struggle of Solidarity in Poland with that of the coal miners in Britain is not that they are confrontations with capitalism, but that they are confrontations with the State. (In Britain the mining industry has been owned by the State for 40

years and controlled by it for 47 years.)

How long are the socialists prepared to wait for socialism? In the last century the anarchist faction was pushed out of history by the believers in state socialism, whether by Marxism in the First International or by Fabianism in Britain. Ordinary citizens outside were, of course, unaffected, but when large-scale socialist movements emerged as contenders for political power, it was state socialism which represented the socialist ideology to the ordinary nonpolitical population. In both East and West it has utterly discredited itself, because in the East it implies the continuance of a police state and the growth of a new class structure with the workers at the bottom of the pyramid, just as they always were, and in the West it implies a similar, if rather more flexible, managerial hierarchy with a new sub-proletariat of superfluous people for whom modern high technology industries have no function, not even as Marx's "reserve army of labor." The cost of maintaining the system of welfare capitalism explains why grotesque political figures like Reagan in America or Thatcher in Britain are actually popular among the electorate. (I need hardly emphasize that *their* belief in "small government" does not extend to the key instruments of the state: the armed services, the law and the police.)

I take no pleasure in the crisis of socialism. I do not believe that disillusionment necessarily leads people to anarchism. The socialist movement arose from generous social impulses which are a valuable asset in any society. I think in fact that our habit of describing human societies as capitalist or socialist is a misleading legacy from Marxist economic determinism. The character of a society is *not* determined by its dominant economic system. Every human society is in fact a plural society in which large areas of activity are not in conformity with the officially imposed or declared values. Just as there are many aspects of capitalist societies which are not operated on capitalist principles so many aspects of societies alleged to be socialist are not dominated by socialist economics.

The ordinary citizen has every reason to be glad of this pluralism as the one thing that makes life tolerable in either kind of society. If socialist movements recover their impetus and their popular support it seems to me that it will through their becoming *more* pluralist, *more* tolerant of divergence and dissent. If they become *less* so it will imply regimes like that of Pol Pot in Kampuchea or like that of the Cultural Revolution period in China which all Chinese now look back upon as a national disaster.

**A**narchism has always been the unheeded conscience of the political left. If socialist movements recover their integrity through a new libertarian impulse, what will the function of the anarchists be? I believe it will be what it always was. There is a well known passage in Kropotkin's *Modern Science and Anarchism* where he declares that, "Throughout the history of our civilization, two traditions, two opposed tendencies, have been in conflict: the Roman tradition and the popular tradition, the imperial tradition and the federalist tradition, the authoritarian tradition and the libertarian tradition. Between these two currents, always alive, struggling in humanity—the current of the people and the current of the authorities which thirst for political and religious domination—our choice is made."

Commenting on this remark 23 years ago in the journal *Anarchy*, an Australian anarchist, George Molnar, reminded us that this is a different conception of freedom and of the role of anarchism from that which postpones all solutions until the advent of a hypothetical "free society." It is a conception of freedom as "one thing along with other causes that can be supported or opposed," while the coming or not coming of the social revolution recedes in importance, since freedom and authority are always struggling. Along this line of thought, he remarks, "we can take freedom as a characteristic not of societies as a whole but of certain groups, institutions and people's way of life within any society, and even then not as their exclusive character." Molnar concludes that "the conflict between freedom and authority is the permanent order of the day. Doing politics, advancing freedom as a program for the entire human race, cannot change this; it can only foster illusions about the way society runs."

In this continual struggle between the authoritarian tradition and libertarian tradition, the task of the anarchists for the rest of this century could be that of rescuing socialism from its disastrous liason with the state.

...from...

## Critique of the Marxist

### Theory of the State

by

Michael Bakunin

... (anarchists) neither intend nor desire to thrust upon our own or any other people any scheme of social organization taken from books or concocted by ourselves. We are convinced that the masses of the people carry in themselves, in their instincts (more or less developed by history), in their daily necessities, and in their conscious or unconscious aspirations, all the elements of the future social organization. We seek this ideal in the people themselves. Every state power, every government, by its very nature places itself outside and over the people and inevitably subordinates them to an organization and to aims which are foreign to and opposed to the real needs and aspirations of the people. We declare ourselves the enemies of every government and every state power, and of governmental organization in general. We think that people can be free and happy only when organized from the bottom up in completely free and independent associations, without governmental paternalism though not without the influence of a variety of free individuals and parties.

Such are our ideas as social revolutionaries, and we are therefore called anarchists. We do not protest this name, for we are indeed the enemies of any governmental power, since we know that

such a power depraves those who wear its mantle equally with those who are forced to submit to it. Under its pernicious influence the former become ambitious and greedy despots, exploiters of society in favor of their personal or class interests, while the latter become slaves.

Idealists of all kinds—metaphysicians, positivists, those who support the rule of science over life, doctrinaire revolutionists—all defend the idea of state and state power with equal eloquence, because they see in it, as a consequence of their own systems, the only salvation for society. Quite logically, since they have accepted the basic premise (which we consider completely mistaken) that thought precedes life, that theory is prior to social experience, and, therefore, that social science has to be the starting point for all social upheavals and reconstructions. They then arrive unavoidably at the conclusion that because thought, theory, and science, at least in our times, are in the possession of very few, these few ought to be the leaders of social life, not only the initiators, but also the leaders of all popular movements. On the day following the revolution the new social order should not be organized by the free association of people's organizations or unions, local and regional, from the bottom up, in accordance with the demands and instincts of the people, but only by the dictatorial power of this learned minority, which presumes to express the will of the people.

This fiction of a pseudorepresentative government serves to conceal the domination of the masses by a handful of privileged elite; an elite elected by hordes of people who are rounded up and do not know for whom or for what they vote. Upon this artificial and abstract expression of what they falsely imagine to be the will of the people and of which the real living people have not the least idea, they construct both the theory of statism as well as the theory of so-called revolutionary dictatorship.

The differences between revolutionary dictatorship and statism are superficial. Fundamentally they both represent the same principle of minority rule over the majority in the name of the alleged "stupidity" of the latter and the alleged "intelligence" of the former. Therefore they are both equally reactionary since both directly and inevitably must preserve and perpetuate the political and economic privileges of the ruling minority and the political and economic subjugation of the masses of the people.

Now it is clear why the dictatorial revolutionists, who aim to overthrow the existing powers and social structures in order to erect upon their ruins their own dictatorships, never were or will

be the enemies of government, but, to the contrary, always will be the most ardent promoters of the government idea. They are the enemies only of contemporary governments, because they wish to replace them. They are the enemies of the present governmental structure, because it excludes the possibility of their dictatorship. At the same time they are the most devoted friends of governmental power. For if the revolution destroyed this power by actually freeing the masses, it would deprive this pseudorevolutionary minority of any hope to harness the masses in order to make them the beneficiaries of their own government policy.

We have already expressed several times our deep aversion to the theory of Lassalle and Marx, which recommends to the workers, if not as a final ideal at least as the next immediate goal, the *founding of a people's state*, which according to their interpretation will be nothing but "the proletariat elevated to the status of the governing class."

Let us ask, if the proletariat is to be the ruling class, over whom is it to rule? In short, there will remain another proletariat which will be subdued to this new rule, to this new state. For instance, the peasant "rabble" who, as it is known, does not enjoy the sympathy of the Marxists, who consider it to represent a lower level of culture, will probably be ruled by the factory proletariat of the cities. Or, if this problem is to be approached nationalistically, the Slavs will be placed in the same subordinate relationship to the victorious German proletariat in which the latter now stands to the German bourgeoisie.

If there is a State, there must be domination of one class by another and, as a result, slavery; the State without slavery is unthinkable—and this is why we are the enemies of the State.

What does it mean that the proletariat will be elevated to a ruling class? Is it possible for the whole proletariat to stand at the head of the government? There are nearly forty million Germans. Can all forty million be members of the government? In such a case, there will be no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those who are slaves.

The Marxist theory solves this dilemma very simply. By the people's rule, they mean the rule of a small number of representatives elected by the people. The general, and every man's, right to elect the representatives of the people and the rulers of the State is the latest word of the Marxists, as well as of the democrats. This is a lie, behind which lurks the despotism of the ruling minority, a lie all the more dangerous in that it appears to express the so-called will of the people.

Ultimately, from whatever point of view we look at this question, we come always to the same sad conclusion, the rule of the great masses of the people by a privileged minority. The Marxists say that this minority will consist of workers. Yes, possibly of former workers, who, as soon as they become the rulers of the representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will look down at the plain working masses from the governing heights of the State; they will no longer represent the people, but only themselves and their claims to rulership over the people. Those who doubt this know very little about human nature.

These elected representatives, say the Marxists, will be dedicated and learned socialists. The expressions "learned socialist," "scientific socialism," etc., which continuously appear in the speeches and writings of the followers of Lassalle and Marx, prove that the pseudo-People's State will be nothing but a despotic control of the populace by a new and not at all numerous aristocracy of real and pseudoscientists. The "uneducated" people will be totally relieved of the cares of administration, and will be treated as a regimented herd. A beautiful liberation, indeed!

The Marxists are aware of this contradiction and realize that a government of scientists will be a real dictatorship regardless of its democratic form. They console themselves with the idea that this rule will be temporary. They say that the only care and objective will be to educate and elevate the people economically and politically to such a degree that such a government will soon become unnecessary, and the State, after losing its political or coercive character, will automatically develop into a completely free organization of economic interests and communes.

There is a flagrant contradiction in this theory. If their state would be really of the people, why eliminate it? And if the State is needed to emancipate the workers, then the workers are not yet free, so why call it a People's State? By our polemic against them we have brought them to the realization that freedom or anarchism, which means a free organization of the working masses from the bottom up, is the final objective of social development, and that every state, not excepting their People's State, is a yoke, on the one hand giving rise to despotism and on the other to slavery. They say that such a yoke-dictatorship is a transitional step towards achieving full freedom for the people: anarchism or freedom is the aim, while state and dictatorship is the means, and so, in order to free the masses of people, they have first to be enslaved!

Upon this contradiction our polemic has come to a halt. They insist that only dictatorship (of course their own) can create freedom for the people. We reply that all dictatorship has no objective other than self-perpetuation, and that slavery is all it can generate and instill in the people who suffer it. Freedom can be created only by freedom, by a total rebellion of the people, and by a voluntary organization of the people from the bottom up.

The social theory of the antistate socialists or anarchists leads them directly and inevitably towards a break with all forms of the State, with all varieties of bourgeois politics, and leaves no choice except a social revolution. The opposite theory, state communism and the authority of the scientists, attracts and confuses its followers and, under the pretext of political tactics, makes continuous deals with the governments and various bourgeois political parties, and is directly pushed towards reaction.

The cardinal point of this program is that the State alone is to liberate the (pseudo-) proletariat. To achieve this, the State must agree to liberate the proletariat from the oppression of bourgeois capitalism. How is it possible to impart such a will to the State? The proletariat must take possession of the State by a revolution—an heroic undertaking. But once the proletariat seizes the State, it must move at once to abolish immediately this eternal prison of the people. But according to Mr. Marx, the people not only should not abolish the State, but, on the contrary, they must strengthen and enlarge it, and turn it over to the full disposition of their benefactors, guardians, and teachers—the leaders of the Communist Party, meaning Mr. Marx and his friends—who will then liberate them in their own way. They will concentrate all administrative power in their own strong hands, because the ignorant people are in need of a strong guardianship; and they will create a central state bank, which will also control all the commerce, industry, agriculture, and even science. The mass of the people will be divided into two armies, the agricultural and the industrial, under the direct command of the state engineers, who will constitute the new privileged political-scientific class.

*[This is the "famous passage" mentioned in Colin Ward's essay. It was written in 1873.]*

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