

'WILOCAT' DISCUSSION TEXT. BAKUNIN VS. MARX

THE RED MENACE 11

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It is indicative of Bakunin's methods that he repeatedly accused Marx of advocating a "Peoples' state" (see for example Dolgoff, ed., Bakunin on Anarchy, Vintage, 1972), an accusation that in view of his failure to cite any evidence to support it (check the sources and see if Bakunin ever offers a single quote to back up his claim), and in view of Marx's and Engel's repeated repudiation of the concept, can only be interpreted as a deliberate fabrication on Bakunin's part. And it is hardly to the credit of several generations of anarchists that they have continued to swallow Bakunin's fictions on this matter without ever bothering to look for evidence to back them up.

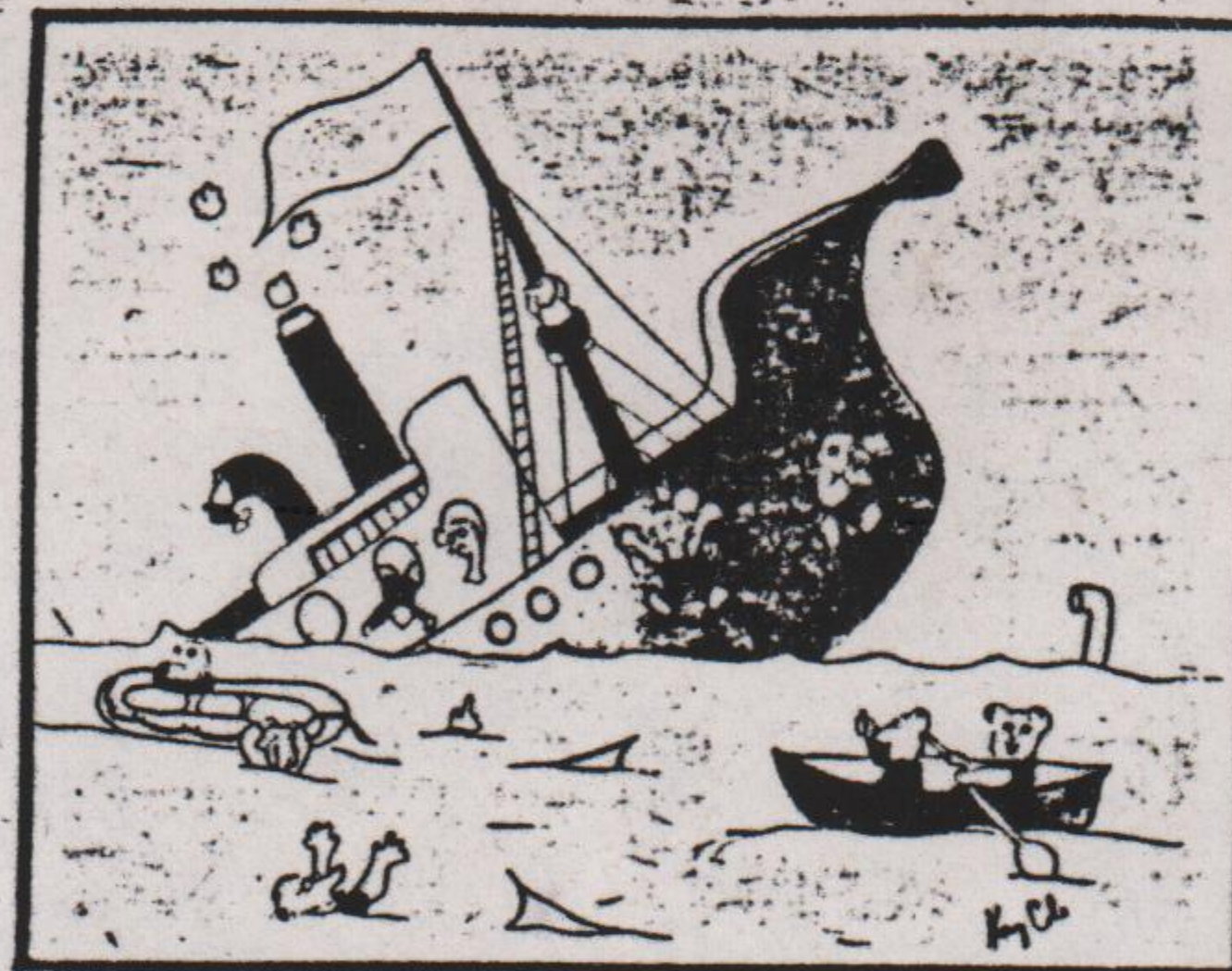
Marx and Engels' position on the state, while not free of ambiguities and not above criticism, was quite different from what Bakunin claimed. It is spelled out most extensively in Marx's *The Civil War in France*, but is developed in numerous other works as well. What Marx foresaw was that during the revolutionary period of struggle against the bourgeoisie, the proletariat would use the state apparatus to crush the bourgeoisie: "to achieve its liberation it employs means which will be discarded after the liberation". (Marx, *Conceptus of Bakunin's State and Anarchy*, 1874-75). After the vanquishing of the bourgeoisie, the state has outlived its usefulness. Marx pointed to the Paris Commune as being very close to what he had in mind; Bakunin too was enthusiastic about the Commune, yet continued to accuse Marx of secretly holding very different views. This Bakunist nonsense has been endorsed by other anarchists as well. For example, the anarchist writer Arthur Mueller Lehning writes that "It is an irony of history that at the very moment when the battle between the authoritarians and the antiauthoritarians in the International reached its apogee, Marx should in effect endorse the program of the antiauthoritarian tendency... The Commune of Paris had nothing in common with the state socialism of Marx and was more in accord with the ideas of Proudhon and the federalist theories of Bakunin. Civil War in France is in full contradiction with all Marx's writings on the question of the State." (quoted in Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 260) This is a remarkable piece of doublethink. Marx's major work on the state is said to be "in full contradiction" with "all" his writings on the state. What writings on the state is Lehning referring to then? We don't know, because he doesn't say. As always, in anarchist polemics, we have to take him on faith. Certainly Lehning cannot be referring to the *Poverty of Philosophy*, written in 1847, or *The Communist Manifesto*, written in 1848, or the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, written in 1875, or to the private letters Marx was writing at the same time as the publication of *The Civil War in France* in 1871. All of these consistently maintain that the state is incompatible with socialism. Together they comprise most, if not "all" of Marx's writings on the state. But Lehning (and Bakunin, and Dolgoff, and Avrich, and Brothers, and Murtaugh, and...) know better. Somewhere, in some mythical world known only to anarchists, there are to be found Marx's *real* views on the state, the "People's State of Marx" (Bakunin on Anarchy, P.318), which is "completely identical" with "the aristocratic-monarchic state of Bismark". (Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 319).

How does one refute an "argument" which, without a single shred of evidence, except racial predisposition ("as a German and a Jew, he (Marx) is from head

to toe an authoritarian" — Bakunin in 1872.) without a single quotation, attributes ideas and concepts to Marx that Marx had repeatedly attacked? There are two alternatives: either one swallows everything Bakunin, Dolgoff, and Co. say, on faith, because they are anarchists, or one takes the path of intellectual integrity, and tries to discover Marx and Engels' views on the state by reading Marx and Engels. If one takes the latter course, one might start by reading Engels March 1875 letter to Bebel, in which he says "It is pure nonsense to talk of a free people's state: so long as the proletariat still uses the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore propose to replace state everywhere by *Gemeinwesen*, a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word 'commune'".

It is still possible, of course, to argue that the use of the state by the proletariat in the brief transitional period is dangerous, and could lead to the establishment of a permanent state. (It must be admitted, however, that Bakunin himself envisioned a form of post-revolutionary state, complete with elections, delegates, a parliament, an executive committee, and an army. (Bakunin on Anarchy, P.153) Anarchists are curiously quiet about this, however.

Nevertheless, it remains a fact that in balance, the concern Bakunin expressed about the possible degeneration of the revolution was a valid one, and that Marx for his part failed to give sufficient weight to the dangers posed by this threat to a future revolution. This criticism, however, must itself be qualified in a number of ways, is a far cry from the claims of Bakunin and the anarchists that Marxism was a theory that aimed at the subjection of society to state.



2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

A closely related question is that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, one of the most abused and misunderstood terms of all of Marxism. The question of the transition from capitalism to socialism, and Marx's view of it, is an extremely complicated one that cannot be covered in a few paragraphs. But the point here is simply to dispose of the grossest misunderstandings of the term, fostered by its appropriation by the Bolsheviks, and by the related fact that dictatorship has come to have a quite different meaning today than it had in Marx's time. As Dolgoff puts it, there was then a "loose sense in which the term 'dictatorship' was used by nineteenth-century socialists — to mean simply the preponderant influence of a class, as in Marx's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'". (Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 12) Or to put it more precisely, the dictatorship of the proletariat means the rule by the proletariat as a class, and the suppression of the bourgeoisie as a class. It is perfectly compatible with, and indeed presupposes, the most thorough-going democracy within the working class. The best brief exposition of the Marxian concept, and how it differs from Leninist concepts of dictatorship, comes from Rosa Luxemburg's 1918 polemic against the Bolsheviks:

"We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of bourgeois democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and lack of freedom — not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist

I propose in this article to examine some of the most common anarchist objections to "Marxism". The issues I shall single out are all raised in the recent works cited in the preceding articles all of them were raised, often for the first time, Bakunin at the time when anarchism first emerged as a self-conscious movement defining itself in opposition to all other currents on the left. Therefore I will concentrate primarily on Bakunin in the following discussion, and on some of his differences with Marx. While I realize that Bakunin is not the only interpreter of anarchism, I think this is a valid approach for a number of reasons: (a) it is not possible to cover everything and everybody in a short essay (b) the Bakunin/Marx split was the formative event in the history of anarchism (c) Bakunin is still the most widely read, quoted, and admired anarchist in the anarchist movement itself (d) many of the key anarchist objections to Marxism originate with Bakunin, and these objections continue to be used today; to the extent that it is possible to call them into question, it is possible to call into question current anarchist pre-conceptions about Marxism and to inaugurate a genuine dialogue.

How do anarchists see the Marxist/anarchist split? What are their claims?

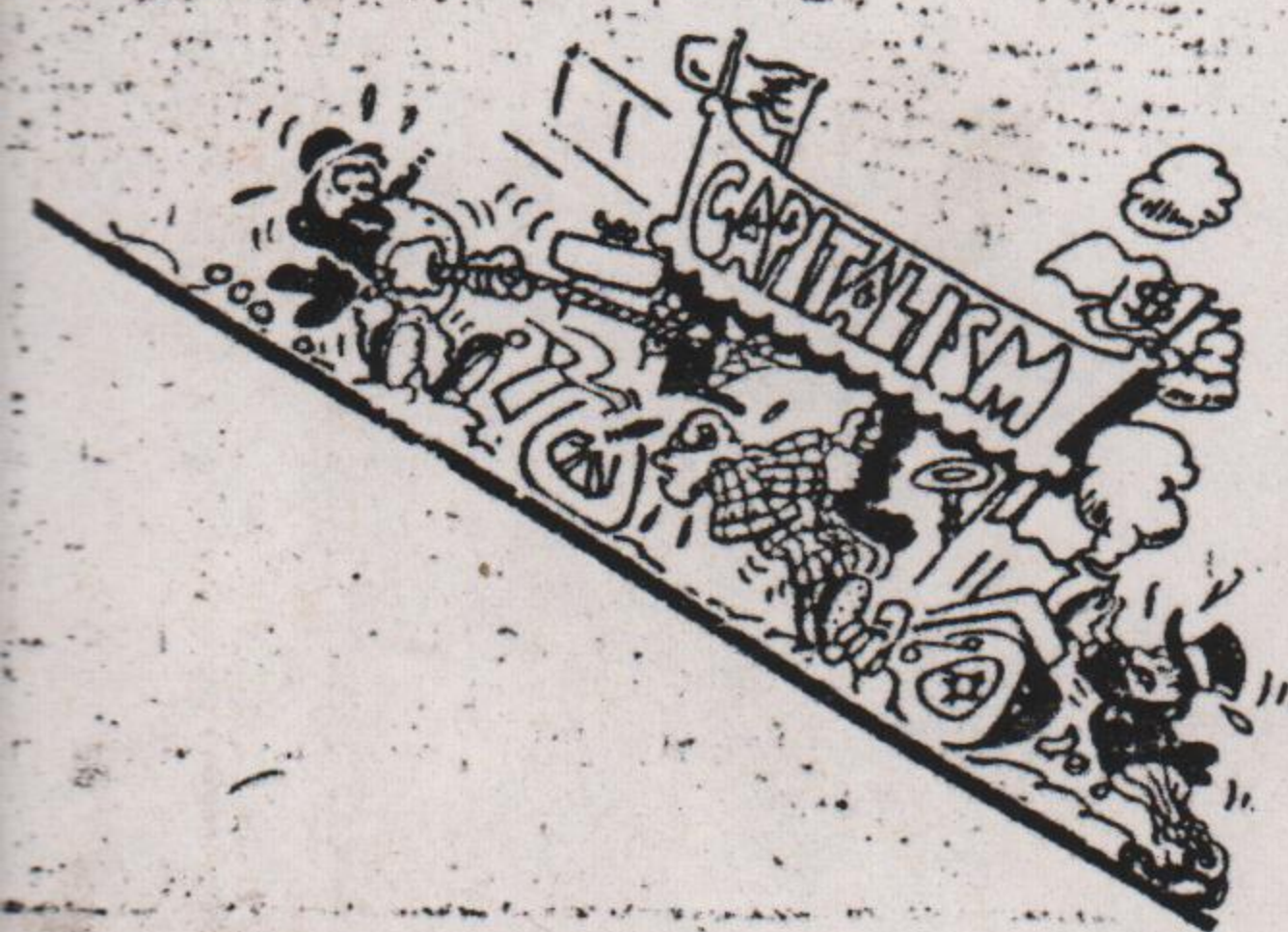
The following beliefs seem to be generally accepted by anarchists:

1. Marxists believe in the creation of a "peoples' state" or a "workers' state"; anarchists believe in the abolition of the state.
2. "Anarchists look to a society in which real decision making involves every one who lives in it"; Marxism instead would set up "a few discipline freaks pulling the strings on a so-called 'proletarian' dictatorship."
3. Marx was an "economic determinist"; Bakunin "emphasized the psychological (subjective) factors in revolution." Marxism is the ego trip of intellectuals who try to fit everything into their "theory of byzantine complexity" — dialectical materialism — which is of "doubtful usefulness" at best and which mainly serves to make it possible for Marxist leaders to establish "control over the movement".
4. Anarchists believe that revolutionary organizations should be open, egalitarian, and completely democratic; marxists on the other hand advocate "hierarchical, power-tripping leadership", as exemplified by the vanguard party and democratic centralism.
5. The original split in the First International between the factions headed by Bakunin and Marx came over the issue of authoritarianism; Marx had Bakunin expelled from the International on trumped-up charges because Bakunin opposed Marx's dictatorial, centralized regime over the International.
6. Marxism is "authoritarian"; anarchism is "libertarian".

What of these objections?

1. The peoples' State.

Perhaps it is not surprising that it is widely believed that Marx originated this concept, given the number of "Peoples' Republics", "Workers' States"; etc. in the world today that call themselves "Marxist". Both the Leninists who use the concept, and the anarchists who oppose it, seem quite unaware that it is nowhere to be found in Marx's writings. Marx, on the contrary, specifically rejected it. (See for example the *Critique of the Gotha Program*).



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democracy to replace bourgeois democracy — not to eliminate democracy altogether.

"But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people, who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination; in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class — that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses...." (Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor paperback, P. 77-78).

jected economic determinism and what he called "crude materialism" out of hand. He did not attempt to reduce all phenomena to economic ones; it is necessary only to read any of his political works to be convinced of this. As Engels says, "According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract senseless phrase." (letter to Joseph Bloch, Sept. 21-22, 1890, in Lewis Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, P. 397-398.)

Anarchists like Paul Avrich, however, have their own view of 'what Marx really meant'. See how Avrich crudely contrasts Marx's and Bakunin's views: (Bakunin) "rejected the view that social change depends on the gradual unfolding of 'objective' historical conditions. He believed, on the contrary, that men shape their own destinies...."

It is unfortunate that Avrich has never read, for example, Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach: "The materialist doctrine (of Feuerbach) that men are the products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are the products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating." Or *The Holy Family*: "History does nothing, it 'does not possess immense riches', it 'does not fight battles'. It is *men*, real, living men, who do all this; who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving — as if it were an individual person — its own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends." (Bottomore, ed., *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, Pelican, P. 78.)

4, 5, 6. The nature of the revolutionary organization; authoritarianism and libertarianism.

This is again a very complicated question: it is impossible to do justice to either Marx's or Bakunin's views in a short and rather polemical articles that aims at challenging certain gross misconceptions rather than at evaluating and criticizing their ideas and practice in a rigorous and comprehensive way. It is necessary to understand, first of all, that the ideas of both Marx and Bakunin, as expressed in their writings, are in certain respects contradictory; neither Marx, nor certainly Bakunin, was consistent throughout his life. Secondly, the practice of both men was sometimes at variance with what they advocated. Neither was able always to live up to the standards set down. Both men displayed considerable streaks of

arrogance and authoritarianism in their own personalities.



Nevertheless, there remains a body of writing and practice that makes it possible to evaluate what Marx and Bakunin stood for.

I shall argue that a serious examination of the question yields the following points:

1. Bakunin deliberately distorted and falsified Marx's views on the issues under dispute.
2. The accusation that led to Bakunin's expulsion from the International, that of heading a secret society which aimed to infiltrate and take over the International, was true. (Since this seems to be accepted by most historians, this point will not be pursued. See for example Woodcock's *Anarchism*, P. 168, or Aileen Kelly's article in the January 22, 1976 issues of the *New York Review of Books*.) The only point worth noting here is that the "authoritarian" federal structures of the International that Bakunin protested against so vehemently in 1871 and 1872 were introduced to the international shortly before, not on the initiative of the General Council of which Marx was a member, but on the motion of *Bakunin's* supporters, with Bakunin's active participation and support. It was only after he failed to gain control over the structures of the International that Bakunin suddenly discovered their "authoritarianism".
3. The charge of authoritarianism and dictatorial views can be directed against Bakunin with a great deal more justification than they can against Marx. Bakunin's deliberate misrepresentations of Marx's views on the state were noted earlier. Bakunin was obsessed with the idea that all Germans held identically authoritarian views, and consistently attributed the views of some of Marx's bitterest enemies, such as Bismarck and Lassalle, to Marx. Marx's fury at this tactic is a matter of record. Bakunin, in many of his polemics against Marx, argues from the premise that Marx must obviously be authoritarian because he is a German and a Jew, who are by definition authoritarians and statists. (Because of selective editing, this is not evident in Dolgoff's Bakunin anthology.) Bakunin even went further, claiming that Marx was part of an international conspiracy with Bismarck and Rothschild. Such accusations are of course not worthy of reply, but surely they make it clear that it is necessary to treat the "facts" and arguments of the man making them with the greatest caution.

A similar disregard for the most elementary rules of evidence, not to mention decency, permeated most of Bakunin's polemics against Marx. He charged, again and again, that Marx advocated a universal dictatorship, that he believed in a socialism "decreed from the top down". He ignored Marx's lifelong insistence that "the emancipation of the working classes can only be the work of the working classes themselves", and Marx's intransigent opposition to the state. Nor did he attempt to support his accusations with the facts or quotations. In reading Bakunin's caricature of Marx's views — the only "version" of Marxism most anarchists have bothered to familiarize themselves with! — readers will search in vain for one single quotation amidst the hysterical confusion of wild, unsubstantiated charges. There simply are none.

(Almost as bad are those anarchists who lambaste Marx for his "advocacy" of "democratic centralism" and the "vanguard party". Is it really necessary to point out that these concepts were developed long after Marx's death, that Marx never belonged to an organization practising either; that he consistently opposed tiny conspiratorial sects of his day; that he made it a condition of his joining the Communist League that they scrap their closed, undemocratic organizational forms; that he always, and angrily, re-



3. "Economic Determinism"

The question of Marxian materialism and Marx's emphasis on the relations of production is an extremely difficult one which simply cannot be dealt with intelligently in a brief article. At this point it is possible only to say that it raises difficult problems which have to be seriously analyzed. However, while a re-examination of Marx's theory and the admitted contradictions in it are on the agenda, it must be said that the typical anarchist portrayals of it and objections to it are ill-informed misconceptions that contribute less than nothing to the discussion. For example, Marx was not an economic determinist; he re-



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fused attempts by socialists of his day to single him out for special honours or titles in the movement?)

And has it been completely forgotten that one of Marx's chief themes in his criticism of Bakunin was the latter's eternal fascination with conspiratorial, manipulative, sectarian, politics?

For there is, unfortunately for those who believe in anarchist fairy tales, a substantial body of evidence for the contention that Bakunin held precisely those "authoritarian" views which he brazenly attributed to Marx. Those who seek evidence of a penchant for dictatorial, Machiavellian politics will find a good deal of material in the writings of not Marx, but Bakunin. (This is not to say that Bakunin consistently held such views; there are serious contradictions in his thought amounting to a basic polarity.)

Bakunin's advocacy of post-revolutionary state, which continued most of the forms of the pre-revolutionary state, such as parliament, army, elections, etc., was noted earlier, and can be found, for example, in Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 153. Similarly, despite his much-vaunted opposition to any form of independent political action by the working class, one can find him advocating, in his letters, not simply political action, but working class support and action on behalf of bourgeois political parties. (See for example Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 219). And elsewhere, one finds him advocating nothing less than that anarchists run for Parliament. (Bakunin on Anarchy, P. 218).

Nor are these merely products of his naive, youthful days, which are so often used to excuse some of his grossest aberrations, as for example when we find the 'young' Bakunin (at age 35) writing appeals to the Czar while Marx, four years younger, is advocating the revolutionary overthrow of the state. No, these pronouncements, and many others like them, are issued privately at precisely the time that Bakunin is publicly proclaiming his opposition to Marxism because it advocates political action by the working class, and a transitional dictatorship of the proletariat in the immediate post-revolutionary period.

It is also worth contrasting Bakunin's proclamation of the principle, for the future anarchist society, of "from each according to his ability; to each according to his work" (my emphasis) with Marx, who held to much more radical principle, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".

Or consider Bakunin's Rules for his International Alliance, not a passing whim, but the organization to which he gave his primary allegiance while participating in the First International. Here is a sample, written in 1869: "It is necessary that in the midst of popular anarchy, which will make up the very life and all the energy of the revolution, the unity of revolutionary thought and action should be embodied in a certain organ. That organ must be the secret and world-wide association of the international brothers..."

"... the only thing a well-organized secret society can do is first to assist the birth of revolution by spreading among the masses ideas that accord with the instinct of the masses, and to organize, not the army of the revolution — that army must always be the people, but a revolutionary General Staff composed of devoted, energetic and intelligent individuals who are above all sincere — not vain or ambitious — friends of the people, capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary ideas and the popular instincts."

"The number of these individuals should not, therefore, be too large. For the international organization throughout Europe one hundred serious and firmly united revolutionaries would be sufficient. Two or three hundred revolutionaries would be enough for the organization of the largest country."

As the authoritarian Marx said of this libertarian idea: "To say that the hundred international brothers must 'serve as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instincts,' is to create an unbridgeable gulf between the Alliance's revolutionary idea and the proletarian masses; it means proclaiming that these hundred guardsmen cannot be recruited anywhere but from among the privileged classes."

When one sees the views of Bakunin and Marx side by side, it is difficult to remember sometimes that it is Marx, not Bakunin, who is supposed to be the father

of "Marxism-Leninism" and Bakunin not Marx who is supposed to be the father of "anarchism."

Bakunin's authoritarian tendencies were, at their most extreme at precisely the time that he was splitting the International. This was the time of his association with the notorious Nechaev. Most anarchist sources treat this as a passing aberration on Bakunin's part, and indeed he did repudiate Nechaev when he found out the true nature of his activities.

But the fact remains that Bakunin did enter into partnership with Nechaev, and under his influence wrote a number of tracts that displayed a despotic, Machiavellian approach to revolution that far surpassed anything he ever accused Marx of. The authorship of some of the pieces in question is under dispute, but the relevant point is surely that Bakunin allowed his name to be put to even those pamphlets he did not write, and that he actively worked to have them distributed knowing they bore his name.

In these pamphlets, Nechaev and Bakunin advocate a new social order, to be erected "by concentrating all the means of social existence in the hands of Our Committee, and the proclamation of compulsory physical labour for everyone," compulsory residence in communal dormitories, rules for hours of work, feeding of children, and other minutiae. As the "authoritarian" Marx put it: "What a beautiful model of barrack-room communism! Here you have it all: communal eating, communal sleeping, assessors and offices regulating education, production, consumption, in a word, all social activity, and to crown all, Our Committee, anonymous and unknown to anyone, as the supreme dictator. This indeed is the purest anti-authoritarianism..."

When one looks at Bakunin's views on authority and revolution in detail, it is hard to disagree with Marx's and Engels' claim that Bakunin and his followers simply used the word "authoritarian" to mean something they didn't like. The word "authoritarian" was then, and remains today for many libertarians, a way of avoiding serious political questions. For the fact that not all authority is bad; that in certain situations authority is necessary and unavoidable. As Engels says, "A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all". And some form of authority, i.e., decision-making structure, is necessary in any form of interaction, co-operation, or organization that is social rather than individual. In a socialist society, it will still be necessary to make decisions about things; these decisions will necessarily reflect the will, i.e., the authority, of the majority. This is not a violation of collectivity, but an absolutely indispensable component of it. To say, as many anarchists do, that they reject all forms of authority, even that which is willingly accepted, even that which is the result of democratic decision-making, is simply to advocate either rule by minority, or a return to the purest form of free-market capitalism, as is advocated by the "libertarian" right. No amount of talk about "consensus" or local autonomy or individual initiative will alter this fact. Consensus is not always attainable, because sometimes people do not agree. Then a decision-making process is necessary, and if it is democratic, the minority will have to accede to the majority. Autonomy and individual initiative can still have the fullest possible play, but this does not alter the fact that the authority of the majority has prevailed in the question at hand.

There is another aspect of Bakunin that must be confronted because, like his ill-defined views on authority, it has remained a part of the anarchist movement. Running through all of Bakunin's thought and subsequent anarchist thought and practice is a dark thread, an infatuation with violence, with destruction for the sake of destruction, action for the sake of action, distrust of logic, intellect, and knowledge, a love for conspiratorial, tightly controlled organization. For the most part, these things remained subsidiary to his — and his successor's — genuinely libertarian and humanistic instincts.

During the period of Bakunin's association with Nechaev, who was attracted solely by Bakunin's dark side, this aspect took over. Then, confronted with the realization of this dark thread in practice, in the person of Nechaev, Bakunin shrank back in genuine horror. However, as Aileen Kelly notes, "even then he managed to integrate Nechaev's villainy into his own fantasies, writing to his astonished friends that Nechaev's methods were those of a "pure" and "saintly" nature who, faced with the apathy of the masses and intellectuals in Russia, saw no other way but coercion to mold the latter into a force deter-

mined enough to move the masses to revolution. Such reasoning, Bakunin concluded, 'contains, alas! much truth.'"

Kelly continues: "This grotesque assessment of Nechaev is very revealing. At a time when the gap between man's empirical and ideal natures seemed enormous, Bakunin, albeit reluctantly, concluded that if men do not wish to liberate themselves, it might be necessary for those with their highest interests at heart to liberate them against their will."

To Bakunin's credit, he continually struggled against the implications of this aspect of his thought. Always fascinated by all the 'revolutionary' shortcuts, he nevertheless remained loyal as well to his libertarian instincts, and it is this aspect of his remarkably polarized vision that he left as his lasting heritage. The anarchist movement that he fathered has also been plagued by the same polarity, by the tension between real libertarianism on the one side, and the sometimes irresistible attraction of anti-intellectualism, terrorism, and conspiracy, on the other. The anarchist movement needs to come to grips with Bakunin's ambiguous heritage. And to do so, it also needs to come to terms with Marx.

Ulli Diemer



Standing Monk, a woodcut by Nicholas Sperakis. A book of Sperakis' woodcuts has been published by Smyrna Press, Box 841, Stuyvesant Station, New York, N.Y. 10009, U.S.A.

