

CHAPTER 18

Anarchism and Marxism

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Introduction

Any analysis of the relationship between Marxism and anarchism immediately confronts several problems. One is that, while there is a fair amount of scholarly literature on the topic, it tends to be uneven.¹ Many studies have focused on the conflict between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin in the 1870s, with a few asides on earlier and later conflicts, but very few have compared anarchism and Marxism as evolving traditions. Consequently, there is very little discussion of how later Marxists like Mao Zedong differ from the anarchists. Another problem is that many analyses are quite schematic and simplified, eliding deeper issues (e.g., the extent to which Marxists and anarchists differ on basic concepts like “class” and the “state”) and concentrating first and foremost on strategic differences (most obviously, the question of whether the state can or should be wielded by the oppressed). Without discounting the importance of strategic positions, the fact remains that they are closely linked to larger analyses of economy, society, and history and, as such, an accurate understanding of the differences between Marxists and anarchists in this regard requires an equally accurate understanding of the ways these two traditions understand (for example) the basic dynamics of capitalism.

A further problem has been a long history of debates between the two currents marked by tendencies towards caricature and misunderstanding. Neither side is blameless; both have produced sectarian polemics and critiques lacking intellectual rigor.² Marxists have correctly objected to anarchist criticisms that reduce Marxist thought to functionalism, scientism, and a teleological view

1 Key texts include J. Clark, “Marx, Bakunin and the Problem of Social Transformation,” *Telos* 42 (1979): 80–97; A.W. Gouldner, “Marx’s Last Battle: Bakunin and the First International,” *Theory and Society* 11, no. 6 (1982): 853–884; Daniel Guérin, “Marxism and Anarchism,” in *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*, ed. D. Goodway (London: Routledge, 1989), 109–125; D. Miller, *Anarchism* (London: J.M. Dent, 1984), chapter 6.

2 Despite some insightful points, the anarchist Warlaam Tcherkesoff’s “Pages of Socialist History” is so hostile to Marxism that it denies Marx all originality and insight, going so far as to claim, very unconvincingly, that the *Communist Manifesto* was itself plagiarized. See W. Tcherkesoff, *Pages of Socialist History: Teachings and Acts of Social Democracy* (New York: C.B. Cooper, 1902), 55–66.

of history.³ Indeed, anarchist critiques of Marxism sometimes demonstrate little familiarity with key elements of Marxist theory or of key debates within Marxism itself. On the other hand, Marxists often critique straw-man versions of anarchism.⁴ A recent account of syndicalism, for example, argues that its stress on the “necessity and desirability of class struggle” shows that syndicalism was rooted in Marxist rather than anarchist politics.⁵ This not only ignores the fact that anarchists like Bakunin emphasized class struggle⁶ but also that syndicalism itself was pioneered by anarchists from 1860s and, for this reason, has always been a *variant* of anarchism rather than an altogether separate current.⁷ The tendency of many Marxist critiques of anarchism to focus on marginal, unrepresentative strands to the exclusion of the ideas and movements that have been, by any measure, central to anarchism—viz., anarchist-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, and revolutionary syndicalism—also frustrates debates.⁸

A more fruitful and illuminating debate between the two currents requires us to move beyond the “non-debate between Marxist and anarchist tendencies on the revolutionary left.”⁹ This chapter aims at developing a more systematic exposition of the strategic and theoretical differences between the anarchist and Marxist traditions; to move the discussion beyond a narrow focus on the Marx-Bakunin conflict, by considering a wider range of periods, writers and debates; and to unpack more fully the theoretical issues at play. In so doing, it

3 See, for example, D. Harvey, “Listen Anarchist!” (2016), <http://davidharvey.org/2015/06/listen-anarchist-by-david-harvey/>

4 See, for example, V.I. Lenin, “Anarchism and Socialism” [1901], in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 327–330.

5 R. Darlington, “Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy and Spain,” *Anarchist Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 46–47.

6 See I. McKay, “Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism,” *Anarchist Studies* 20, no. 1 (2012): 91.

7 A fuller discussion of this issue falls outside the scope of this chapter. For the argument that syndicalism is an outgrowth of anarchism, see, *inter alia*, McKay, “Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism,” 89–105; W. Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–23* (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 2–22.

8 I discuss this problem “Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defence: Debating *Black Flame*, Revolutionary Anarchism and Historical Marxism,” *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory* 130 (2011): 193–207.

9 P. Blackledge, “Anarchism, Syndicalism and Strategy: A Reply to Lucien van der Walt,” *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory* 131 (2011), <http://isj.org.uk/anarchism-syndicalism-and-strategy-a-reply-to-lucien-van-der-walt/>

seeks to clearly define the boundaries of the Marxist and anarchist traditions in specific relation to classical Marxism (rather than other versions) and to elucidate various debates over historical materialism, the role of the states, the nature of class struggle, and other topics. A major thrust of the argument is that anarchism's social analysis is far richer than often recognized and may be illuminated through a proper exposition of the Marxism/anarchism conflict.

The Meaning of "Marxism" and "Anarchism"

In raising the question of what exactly is meant by "Marxism" and "anarchism," it is not particularly useful to state the truism that there are many "Marxisms" and many "anarchisms," as this merely begs the question of what makes something classifiable as a "Marxism" or an "anarchism" in the first place. Michael Burawoy provides a partial solution, suggesting that it is helpful to think of Marxism as a "tradition," the development of which is similar to that of a tree. Rooted in particular ideas, a trunk arises with branches, twigs, and foliage, each of which has its own sub-branches, etc. and its overall shape develops as the product of both an intrinsic internal logic as well as external pressures.¹⁰ If there are many "Marxisms," accordingly they nonetheless share common features even as they develop in different ways. The metaphor can be extended: there may be many "Marxisms," but not all "Marxisms" are equal. In terms of their weight and importance, some branches are far larger and stronger than others because they are closer to the trunk; others wither; still others, I would add, develop in ways that ultimately leads them to fall off the tree altogether, perhaps setting down new roots. (I will return to this issue in the next section in more detail.) This approach, I suggest, is equally useful for thinking about anarchism as a tradition. The difficulty in both cases lies in identifying the roots from which the ideological and organizational lineages of these traditions grow.

Burawoy locates these in the "fundamental" texts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels,¹¹ but it is by no means clear which texts deserve this designation let alone which parts of these texts are taken to contain essential components. He gives special attention to Marxism's historical materialism, including its vision of a series of class-structured modes of production driven forward by internal contradictions and which generate the forces necessary for their

10 M. Burawoy, "Marxism after Communism," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 2 (2000): 154.

11 Ibid.

own transcendence, as well as the state and other structures generated and conditioned by these modes. He also emphasizes the Marxist concept of an inevitable transition from capitalism to socialism that arises from inherent contradictions in the capitalist mode of production, as well as the resolution of these conflicts through the evolution of capitalism's "grave-diggers"—i.e., the working class transformed into a political party that can seize state power, nationalize the means of production, abolish the class system itself, and, ultimately, usher in the final stage of communism.¹² In this schema, state power is an instrument by which one class dominates another; states only exist in class society and, as classes fade away, the state fades too.

The classical Marxist emphasis on the formation of a revolutionary party and the nationalization of the means of production as core aspects of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is one way of understanding the Marxist political program. By "classical Marxism," I mean the main historical Marxist tradition that runs from the Communist League through the pre-war German Social Democratic Party, and from there to the Communist Parties and their Trotskyist rivals. This statist model did not start with Lenin or Stalin but can be found in the *Communist Manifesto*, the 1872 program for the International Workingmen's Association (or "First International," 1864–1877),¹³ and the work of Kautsky and other members of the Socialist International (or "Second International," 1889–1914)

There is a direct and real continuity between the "fundamental" texts of Marx and Engels and the Marxist tradition as a whole, including its classical form. It is, of course, possible to elaborate more democratic versions of Marxism by redefining the "party" in a way that includes all radical workers and/or institutions like *soviets*; by re-conceptualizing the party's relation to the working class; or by construing the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as self-government—all

12 Ibid., 157–159. This same work, it should be noted, includes elements that foreshadow Burawoy's subsequent attempts to elaborate a "sociological Marxism" that dispenses with the primacy of production, the necessity of revolution (including the seizure of state power by a Marxist party), and the abolition of the commodity form in favor of struggles by "civil society" to "regulate" states and markets through reformist measures alongside localized experiments. What keeps this new theory "Marxist" is unclear. See, e.g., M. Burawoy, "Marxism after Polanyi," in *Marxisms in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique and Struggle*, eds. V. Satgar and M. Williams (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2014), 35–52.

13 K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* [1848] (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 40, 55–56; H. Gerth, ed., *The First International: Minutes of the Hague Conference of 1872* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), 216–217, 285–286.

of which are common strategies in Council Communism.¹⁴ It is not possible, however, to set up a sharp distinction between Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and the larger history of Marxism, including the history of classical Marxism, on the other. This attempt is surprisingly common. Much has been made of Marx's reported statement that he was not a Marxist, but this has been taken out of context. Marx was actually referring to certain French socialists who claimed fidelity to his views, remarking that if *their* views were Marxist, then "I myself am not a Marxist."¹⁵

Another approach holds that Marx and Engels have been misread or betrayed by "more or less faithless successors."¹⁶ This approach fails on several grounds—namely, its quasi-religious reverence for revelatory texts and concern with "faithless" interpreters; its failure to address direct and obvious continuities between the works of Marx and Engels and their "successors"; and its ahistorical approach. Just as the historical record of Christianity cannot be judged in abstraction by selected quotations from the Gospels and epistles or reduced to the acts of Jesus Christ and the early Church, neither can the history of Marxism reasonably be reduced to an exegesis of Marx's or Engels' texts and lives.¹⁷ Marxism must be understood not in terms of a few infallible texts but as a historical force; it is absurd to speak of the correct reading of Marxist writings "while keeping quiet about what the doctrine has become in history."¹⁸ The dominant current—the mainstream of that historical force—has been that of classical Marxism, which comprises the great majority of individual Marxists, organized Marxist movements, and Marxist thought. There is, accordingly, no reason why Marxism should not be judged in large part by the record of classical Marxism, the giant branch of the trunk, the most firmly anchored.

Understood this way, Marxism is a tradition that includes an analytical-scientific dimension, a political-activist dimension, and, at least implicitly, a moral-ethical branch dimension on a commitment to the comprehensive

14 See, e.g., M. Shipway, "Council Communism," in *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. M. Rubel and J. Crump (London: Macmillan, 1987), 104–126.

15 "If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist" (*"Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste"*), quoted in "Letter from Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein" [2–3 Nov. 1882], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 46 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 356. On the context, see B.H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement: The Socialism of Skilled Workers, 1830–1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), 107, 116.

16 Cf. Guérin, "Marxism and Anarchism."

17 C. Castoriadis, "The Fate of Marxism," in *The Anarchist Papers*, ed. D. Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2001), 77.

18 Castoriadis, "The Fate of Marxism," 77.

development of individual capacities. This does not mean that there were not profound ambiguities and contradictions in Marxist thought—including classical Marxism—between the deterministic, economistic and teleological approach of “scientific” Marxism and the “critical” Marxist emphasis on human agency and will.¹⁹ Running alongside the Marxism of necessary historical stages socialist inevitability is one that stresses the active formation of a revolutionary party; the importance of strategy and tactics; and the choices of the proletarian-dictatorial state as enabling the necessary link between capitalism and the end goal of history.

These tensions should not be seen as absolute—the material base, after all, is comprised of people who exercise agency within structured constraints and around structured interests.²⁰ Nor should they be understood as equivalent to the tensions between classical Marxism and libertarian Marxism. Just as Council Communism displays certain tendencies toward determinism and teleology, so, too, does classical Marxism contain strong elements of voluntarism. Examples of the latter include Kautsky’s emphasis on the role of correct revolutionary tactics and strategy;²¹ Lenin’s stress on the revolutionary party as the critical agent of change; Trotsky’s insistence that “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer,”²² Stalin’s argument that the Soviet regime could build “socialism in one country” by avoiding the fetishization of economic laws and deliberately creating “socialist forms of economy ... from scratch,”²³ Mao Zedong’s stress on rural peasant-based “protracted people’s war” as a substitute for urban proletarian mobilization, Ché Guevara’s *foquismo*, etc.

Applying a similar line of reasoning to anarchism also begs the question of which texts are fundamental, and which ideas essential, to the anarchist tradition. This issue can be addressed somewhat obliquely by considering existing debates over how best to define anarchism. Space precludes a full engagement with this topic, but several major approaches may be noted and briefly assessed. The first maintains that anarchism is indefinable by its very nature, its core features and boundaries ever in flux. This is patently illogical insofar as it entails concrete definitional features yet denies that such features are

19 A.W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 33–88.

20 K. Kautsky, *The Road to Power* (Chicago: Samuel Bloch, 1909), 33–41.

21 Ibid., 60.

22 L. Trotsky, *The Lessons of October* [1924] (London, Bookmarks, 1987), 72.

23 J. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* [1951] (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 5.

possible. In any case, partisans of this approach do not consistently apply it; since none of them, to my knowledge, have ever characterized Stalin or Hitler as anarchists, it is obvious that very definite core features and boundaries are indeed in place.

A second approach defines anarchism as a venerable current of revolt that extends back into the mists of Asian and European antiquity. This approach, which originated in the 1890s, was adopted by many notable self-identified anarchists, including Peter Kropotkin.²⁴ Its main weakness is that it includes an assortment of figures and movements that share little in common and, as a result, it struggles to provide clear or consistent definitional criteria for “anarchism.” Major differences are downplayed and the criteria for inclusion seem arbitrary and opaque. The same weakness befalls the third approach, which defines anarchism as a methodology of struggle that aims to build decentralized, prefigurative movements by means of direct action. This approach is implicit or explicit in much of the recent literature on anarchist influences on Western “anti-globalization” movements.²⁵ The problem here is that organizing styles of this sort are not unique to anarchists nor invariably rooted in anarchist traditions, in which case it is unclear on what grounds they should be seen as intrinsically anarchist or, conversely, how anarchism might be distinguished from other currents that employ them.

The fourth approach, in contrast, posits a clear, fixed, and uniform definition: anarchists are those who seek to “negate the State,” even if they disagree on precisely what this entails or how it might be accomplished.²⁶ Minimalist definitions of this sort were developed by identifying common elements in a range of movements that have been called “anarchist,” but since the selection of which movements to include is quite arbitrary, the inference is questionable.²⁷ In any case, a consistent application of this definition of anarchism would logically entail the inclusion of Marxism, as it explicitly advocates the “withering

24 See, for example, Peter Kropotkin, “Anarchism” [1905] in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin*, ed. R. Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), 287.

25 See, for example, U. Gordon, “Anarchism Reloaded,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 32–33.

26 One of the main originators of this approach was the German jurist Paul Eltzbacher. See his *Anarchism: Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy* [1900] (London: Freedom Press, 1960), 189, 194, 201.

27 M. Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-century European Anarchism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), 16–19.

away” of the state.²⁸ The *Communist Manifesto* argued that the final communist society would be stateless,²⁹ and Lenin asserted that the Bolsheviks “... do not at all differ from the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the *aim*.”³⁰ Either these views (and the currents they represent) must be included, in which case the inability of the definition to identify the differentiating features of anarchism is revealed, or else they must be excluded, in which case the necessity—and implicit application—of additional definitional criteria is made clear. Since they are always excluded, and since there are no grounds for excluding them, the fallacy of this definition is obvious.

Significantly, the scholarship that defined anarchism as anti-statism—which originated in the early 1900s—was a *response* to the emergence of a self-defined anarchist movement that “initially appeared to contemporaries to be a new phenomenon,” and a “general awareness of an ‘anarchist’ position” dates to the late 1870s.³¹ It was this new movement itself, moreover, that began to promulgate the myth of an ancient anarchist tradition in the 1890s. Understood in context, the basically propagandistic function of this mythologizing is revealed as an obvious attempt to drape an embattled current in the clothes of venerable lineage while simultaneously providing an important impetus for vague or loose definitions of anarchism. But just as nationalist myths do not provide reliable guides to national history, the same is true of anarchist myths in relation to anarchist history.

The “new phenomenon” of anarchism emerged within the First International—that is, within a key sector of the rising socialist and working class milieu of the mid- to late 1800s. Even anarchist mythology concedes that anarchism originated as an organized movement in this context. It is reasonable, accordingly, to define anarchism in terms of the ideas of this movement, and, more narrowly, to understand its essential positions through the arguments of its foremost figures: Bakunin and Kropotkin. It was through debates

28 For example, J. Stalin, “The Results Of The First Five-Year Plan” [1933], in *Leninism: Selected Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 366–378; Z. Mao, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China” [1949], in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, vol. 4 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 372.

29 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 40, 55–56.

30 V.I. Lenin, “The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution” [1917], in *Selected Works in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 257, 281. Emphasis in original.

31 Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism*, 16.

and struggles within the First International that anarchism was first constituted as a distinct current and that syndicalism was developed as part of the anarchist repertoire. The public personas of Marx and Engels stressed the “scientific” character of their thought; indeed, it was on precisely this basis that they distinguished themselves from the utopian socialists. However, their activities within the First International—first against the Proudhonists, then the Blanquists, then the Bakuninists—demonstrated very clearly that actual Marxist political work involved a great deal of emphasis on agency and choice. In the lead up to The Hague Congress of 1872, the Marxists actively campaigned on behalf of their own positions in various ways, seeking to expel Bakunin from, and impose their program within, the International.

None of this campaigning was necessary if impersonal historical processes built into the capitalist mode of production ensured the ultimate identity of Marxism, socialism, and the proletarian movement. That Marxist victory was by no means foreordained, and that anarchism was a rival current of great historical importance, was clearly demonstrated by two subsequent developments. First, Marx and Engels suffered a crushing defeat in 1872 when The Hague Congress was repudiated by almost every section of the International at the subsequent anarchist-led St. Imier Congress;³² and second, anarchists steamed ahead to become by the early 1900s the “dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist radical Left,” the main vehicle of global opposition to industrial capitalism, autocracy, latifundism, and imperialism,” an immense “gravitational force.”³³ This influence extended outside the West into much of the colonial and postcolonial world, at least in the 1920s, where Marxism was of little consequence prior to Lenin.

The anarchist tradition involves ideological and organizational continuity with the anarchists of the First International—that is, the first anarchists—and in this way may be said to have clear boundaries. On this view, the “fundamental” texts of anarchism are the anarchist writings of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, insofar as these form the roots from which the trunk, branches, twigs and foliage of the anarchist tradition arise. It follows, accordingly, that many bodies of thought that are sometimes labeled “anarchist” in both anarchist mythology and scholarly work do not actually belong to this tradition.

32 See, for example, R. Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism in the International Workers' Association, 1864–1877*, trans. A.W. Zurbrugg (London: Merlin Press, 2015), 66–130 and G.M. Stekloff, *The History of the First International* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1928), part 2, chapters 3–4.

33 B. Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2006), 2, 54.

These include Godwinite utilitarianism, Stirnerite individualism, Proudhonist mutualism, Tolstoyan Christianity, and anti-industrial “primitivism.”

While there is no question that Proudhonist mutualism helped nourish anarchism’s roots—as did Marxism³⁴—anarchism itself was a “Proudhonism ... greatly developed and taken to its ultimate conclusion.”³⁵ Proudhonist mutualism argued, essentially, that the development of a non-capitalist sector of independent artisans, farmers, cooperatives, and non-profit banks would facilitate a peaceful transition to socialism (or, more precisely, to a form of what would nowadays be called market socialism). Bakunin insisted this was “impossible” since the mass of the people had already been expropriated by “monopoly capital” and “vast landed property” and so could scarcely hope to establish enterprises that could survive, let alone displace, the “all-powerful competition”³⁶ of the “despotic, oligarchic monopoly” of big business and the banks.³⁷

As with Marxism, there is some room for debate on what constitutes the “fundamental” texts of Bakunin and Kropotkin as well and which parts of those texts should be viewed as essential. In various works, I have drawn special attention to anarchism’s class-centered analysis of society.³⁸ In its most sophisticated form, this analysis eschews economism and understands class in turns of interdependent relations of domination and production, partly embodied in the state, that help generate and reinforce a series of oppressive social and economic inequalities among people without always being their primary causes. It also understands the transition from class society to socialism in terms of the rapid replacement of those institutions which foster social and economic inequality (e.g., class, state, and capital) with generalized collectivization and coordinated self-management of the means of administration, coercion, and production. This transition is not inscribed in the trajectory of specific social

34 M. Bakunin, *Marxism, Freedom and the State*, ed. K.J. Kenafick (London: Freedom Press, 1990), 15.

35 M. Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State” [1871], in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 263.

36 M. Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy” [1873], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 345.

37 M. Bakunin, “On the Cooperative Movement” [n.d.], in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 399.

38 See, for example, van der Walt, “Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defence,” 193–207; L. van der Walt, “Anarchism/ Syndicalism as a Vision, Strategy and Experience of Bottom-up Socialist Democracy: A Reply to Daryl Glaser,” *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 40, no. 2 (2013): 339–349; L. van der Walt, “Reclaiming Syndicalism: From Spain to South Africa to Global Labour Today,” *Global Labour Journal* 5, no. 2 (2014): 239–252.

formations but is fundamentally a *potential* outcome that depends upon adequate levels of prefigurative class-based self-organization, conscientization, and revolutionary class struggle.

Understood in this way, the anarchist tradition is characterized simultaneously by an analytical-scientific dimension, a political-activist dimension, and, quite explicitly, a moral-ethical dimension centered on a commitment to the complete freedom of the individual through the creation of cooperative, democratic, and egalitarian relations. Like Marxism, anarchism involves a coherent set of ideas; much of its apparent incoherence is an intellectual artefact of vague definitions that seek to encompass a wide range of mutually contradictory ideas, movements and thinkers.

This is not to say that there are no divisions within anarchism. One such division is between two main strategic currents—viz., “insurrectionist” anarchism (which views reforms as illusory, considers movements like unions as reformist and authoritarian, and emphasizes propaganda by the deed as means of provoking a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge) and “mass” anarchism (which stresses the piecemeal building up of mass movements, typically through struggles around immediate issues and reforms, with anarchists participating in such movements to radicalize them and transform them into levers of revolutionary change). Syndicalism—a radical trade union model that envisages bottom-up unions that educate and mobilize workers for immediate gains in the present and workplace take-overs in the future—is an application of mass anarchism.

Not All “Marxisms” and “Anarchisms” are Equal

Although Marxism and anarchism have “identical preoccupations” and are, in fact, “very close” in many respects, there are important differences in their analyses and underlying premises that lead to very “different conclusions.”³⁹ Daniel Guérin captured this situation with his usual lucidity, describing the relationship between anarchist and Marxist as that of “brother and enemy.”⁴⁰ The division, in other words, is situated within the broader working class, socialist family; both traditions were born in the nineteenth century as part of the great rise of the modern working class, and both traditions “at the start, drank at the same proletarian spring.”⁴¹ But despite their common background, their

39 Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism*, pp. 162–163.

40 D. Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 35.

41 Guérin, “Marxism and Anarchism,” 119.

entanglements and similarities, the two traditions have grown apart in theory as well as in practice.

Just as the Marxist “tree” includes councilist Marxist branches and classical Marxist branches, so the anarchist tree includes insurrectionist branches and mass anarchist branches. And just as classical Marxism is a far larger and stronger branch of the Marxist tree than councilist Marxism, so, too, is mass anarchist a far larger and stronger branch of the anarchist tree than the insurrectionist branch. In short, although there are many “Marxisms” and many “anarchisms,” they are not all of equal importance. Historically, the dominant current in Marxism—which includes the majority of individual Marxists, organized Marxist movements, and Marxist writings—has been classical Marxism, the major themes of which are capturing state power, revolutionary dictatorship, the nationalization of means of production, centralized state planning, and the forcible suppression of counter-revolutionary forces. By contrast, the historically dominant current in anarchism—which includes the majority of individual anarchists, organized anarchist movements, and anarchist writings—has been mass anarchism, including syndicalism. There is some debate over the key figures of the canon of mass anarchism beyond Bakunin and Kropotkin, but it should certainly include Piotr Arshinov, Jaime Balius, Kōtuku Shūsui, Li Pei Kan (Ba Jin), Liu Sifu (Shifu), Errico Malatesta, Ricardo Flores Magón, Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, Lucy Parsons, Rudolph Rocker, and Shin Ch’aeho.

Unsurprisingly, the anarchist critique of Marxism has been historically directed at classical Marxism, which, by any reasonable measure, has been the dominant strand running from Marx and Engels, via figures like Kautsky, to Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao, Ché Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Samora Machel, Joe Slovo, etc. This is the Marxism that created Marxist states, the Marxism that shaped the twentieth century. Within itself, this Marxism bears the same tensions between structure and agency, determinism and openness, “scientific” and “critical” Marxism, that exist in the Marxist tradition as a whole.

What the anarchists engaged was the main historical lineage of actually-existing Marxism and what it represented; there is no obvious reason to question whether this tradition constitutes the “real” Marxist tradition, let alone to subordinate it to minor branches on the Marxist tree. If the anarchists did not engage “real” Marxism in their critiques, then neither did most Marxists. Those concepts indelibly associated with the history of Marxism, no less than the consistently repressive character of Marxist regimes, are a consequence of the Marxist tradition itself and cannot be explained away by reference to misreading and other contingent factors. As such, this chapter will not engage with every possible permutation of Marxism, but only with the mainstream

of the Marxist tradition. To the extent that other Marxisms share, on the one hand, core analytical features of classical Marxism (e.g., historical materialism, a teleological and stageist theory of history, an economistic understanding of historical stages and classes, etc.) or, on the other hand, the program of classical Marxism (e.g., the revolutionary party, the workers state, nationalization, centralized state planning, etc.) the following also applies to those variants.

Historical Materialism, States and Classes

The public Marx, stressing the “scientific” character of his theory, presented the “social world as imposing itself on persons, rather than being a fluid medium open to human intervention,” with capitalism the latest “stage in a social evolution *destined* to give rise to another, higher society—socialism.”⁴² Since that inevitable transition involved a (Marxist) political party taking state power, this effectively entailed the inevitable victory, due to the very motion of history, of the Marxist program. In practice, of course, Marx acted in ways that belied this confident projection—for example, fighting against rival left currents, as in his failed effort to expel Bakunin from the First International in 1872⁴³—but this deterministic and teleological analysis was central to his polemics against anarchists, utopian socialists, and others.

Within this model, Marx viewed history as a series of successive stages, each characterized by a dominant mode of production, that evolves through a contradiction between relations and forces of production. Relations and forces of production provide the economic base from which a superstructure of culture, law, philosophy, and politics—including the state—arise in accordance with the needs of the base and in support of its reproduction. The relations of production, in class-based modes, are relations between owners and non-owners of the means of production. In this model, “All moral theories are the *product*, in the last analysis, of the *economic stage* which society reached at that particular epoch.”⁴⁴ The continual expansion of the forces of production was initially assisted, but then contradicted, by extant relations of production. This initiates

42 Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*, 32, 41. Emphasis in original.

43 Although Marxist narratives present Marx as victorious, the fateful 1872 congress of the International was repudiated by almost every section, Bakunin was vindicated by the re-constituted International, and Marx was left with a small rump based in New York that soon withered and died.

44 F. Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* [1893] (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr, 1917), 90–91, 94–95. Emphasis in original.

a revolutionary shift to a new mode, the features of which emerge within the old mode; each new mode has its own specific combination of distinctive relations and forces of production, and in each case, the “changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.”⁴⁵

Despite subsequent qualifications—notably Engels’ statement that the base was only the “ultimate explanation” of the superstructure, the site of “final causes” only in the “last analysis”⁴⁶—the production-centered, economy-centered model remained fundamentally unchanged. Classes were relations of production based on ownership; phases of history were characterized by dominant modes of production; contradictions existed between forces and relations of production as well as within relations of production themselves; the state was the instrument of the economically dominant class, etc. Stating that the base is only determinant in the “final analysis” allows space for autonomy in the superstructure, but still asserts, rather than demonstrates, that the base is the “ultimate explanation,” rather than just one sphere of central causes, the primacy of which is historically *contingent*. It does not seriously consider that the so-called superstructure can have fundamental and independent effects on the base, arising from *irreducible* and distinctive dynamics located outside of the base.

Although a minority of anarchists and syndicalists embraced Marx’s and Engels’ materialist conception of history almost uncritically, often in its crudest forms,⁴⁷ Bakunin and Kropotkin specifically rejected core elements of this approach. Their criticisms did not question *whether* economic factors were important (they are evidently central to most situations); rather, they proceeded from the notion that the relative importance of economic factors in a given situation needed to be established, rather than their primacy assumed. This entails many of the critiques of economic determinism indicated in the preceding paragraph, albeit situated in an alternative class-centred but non-reductionist social theory that emphasizes contingency, agency and multiple sites of inequality.

Although Bakunin famously declared himself a “materialist,”⁴⁸ he evidently understood this different from Marx, as he insisted that Marx’s theory ignored “other factors in history, such as the ever-present reaction of political, juridical

45 Ibid. See also K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [1859] (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 20–21.

46 Ibid.

47 See, for example, W.D. Haywood and F. Bohm, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1911), 56.

48 M. Bakunin, “God and the State” [1871], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 236, 238.

and religious institutions on the economic situation.”⁴⁹ These “factors” and “institutions” continually had real and independent effects, including upon the base. For example, political cultures played an important role, “even apart from and independent of the economic conditions in each country,” in shaping the “temperament” and “particular character” of peoples and affected by the “intensity of the spirit of revolt.”⁵⁰ Such “factors” and “institutions” need not be reducible to, or even arise from, any economic basis and, moreover, their operations cannot be assumed as a function of economic development.

To elaborate on this point: what Marxism calls bourgeois-democratic revolutions against feudalism can be explained, fairly easily, in Marx’s and Engels’ historical material framework. Because the bourgeoisie arose from within a new, expanding mode of production, so did the corresponding capitalist state, the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie,” enable it to explode the feudal mode. But what classical Marxism calls proletarian-socialist revolutions scarcely fit: the proletariat has neither means of production, nor is it based in a new mode. Therefore, the proletarian-dictatorial state reflects nothing immanent; rather, it *creates* the new socialist mode of production via expropriation, state planning, and the military defense of these processes.

According to Bakunin, the state has its own irreducible dynamics and characteristics. It was, firstly, a highly centralized institution of coercion and administration that necessarily concentrated power in the hands of a small state elite.⁵¹ A strong state could have “only one solid foundation: military and bureaucratic centralization.”⁵² It is precisely the centralized, hierarchical structure of the state that renders it impervious to majoritarian control; by its very nature, the state is a form of governance by minorities. If the whole population could “stand at the head of the government,” then there would be “no government, no state, but, if there is to be a state there will be those who are ruled and those that are slaves.”⁵³

Secondly, the need for a “solid foundation” in (“bureaucratic”) administrative and (“military”) coercive centralization is deeply embedded in the competitive dynamics of the interstate system, which imposes upon every state—including nominally socialist ones—an iron logic of competing for control over territories and populations that parallels (but clearly precedes) the competitive logic of capitalism. This geopolitical rivalry, Bakunin insisted, impels states “to

49 M. Bakunin, “Letter to *La Liberté*” [1872], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 281–282.

50 Ibid., 282–283.

51 Ibid., 281; Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 330.

52 Ibid., 337.

53 Ibid., 330.

exist not on paper but in fact, and not at the mercy of neighboring states but independently,” including by being “invasive, aggressive, conquering.”⁵⁴

This situation implies, thirdly, that the state wields administrative and coercive resources that give it both irreducible sources of power, as well as intrinsic imperatives, independently of the demands of economically powerful groups. Although the optimal development of the forces of production benefits state elites, the state itself is not an agent of such groups and can and does act contrary to their interests, including in ways that are economically damaging. For anarchists, the Marxist claim that the state is a body of armed men defending class rule is, essentially, correct, but the Marxist explanation for this situation is not. The state is no mere instrument or executive committee of the capitalists, since it has its own irreducible sources of power and internal dynamics, its own drive for sovereignty (“to exist not on paper but in fact ... independently”), and control over its own territory and people (“an invasive, aggressive, conquering state”).

This explains both the state’s support of capitalists *as well as* its simultaneous autonomy from them. Although states both ancient and modern have deliberately promoted economic development, this is the result of a *convergence* between the interests of state elites and economic elites. The modern state aids capitalists, for example, not because it is their tool but because it shares their interest in maintaining revenue streams and elite control. Strong modern states need strong economies to fund, through mechanisms such as taxation, the administrative and coercive apparatus, while capitalists need strong states that can provide the administrative and coercive resources that enable capital accumulation.

In the modern period, Kropotkin writes, “State ... and capitalism are inseparable concepts” that are “bound together ... by the bond of cause and effect, effect and cause.”⁵⁵ In most forms of modern society, these two “concepts” have corresponded directly to a division between two spheres—government and economy—but it was possible to envisage their coming together in the form of a “centralized state-capitalism”⁵⁶ in which the state is “the only banker, capitalist, organizer, and director of all national labor, and the distributor of its products.”⁵⁷ Where, then, does this leave the concept of class? Bakunin’s (and, to a lesser extent, Kropotkin’s) views have often been construed as part of the

54 Ibid., 339.

55 P. Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism” [1912], in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets*, 181.

56 Ibid., 170, 186.

57 M. Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis” [1870], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 217.

“new class” tradition, which argues that intellectuals, managers and experts—not the working class—would take power in post-capitalist societies, their rule premised on a “monopoly of knowledge.”⁵⁸ Bakunin did indeed argue that the classical Marxist “dictatorship of the proletariat” would be a dictatorship *over* the proletariat, headed by a “new privileged political-scientific class” comprised of “state engineers.”⁵⁹ There would be a state, and this state would involve “an extremely complex government” that “administer[s] and govern[s] the masses politically” as well as “economically.” Such a state requires rule by experts, “a new class, a new hierarchy of real and counterfeit scientists and scholars.”⁶⁰

But a closer examination of these texts reveals a more complex picture. The “new class” is a “political” as well as a “scientific” class. Although it is “a minority ruling in the name of knowledge” with heads “overflowing with brains,”⁶¹ this is primarily an ideological *justification* for its rule; its power does *not* arise from expertise and science, since many of its members are “counterfeit.” Indeed, rather than running on scientific lines, the new system provides privileges and opportunities for the “shrewd” and “mercenary-minded,” including “a vast field for lucrative, underhanded dealings.”⁶²

Bakunin was clear that the real basis of the “new class” in the “dictatorship of the proletariat” lay in its control over the “production and division of wealth,” including farming, finance, and manufacturing, as well as “considerable armed force” deployed both at home and abroad.⁶³ He also stressed the essential continuity between this system and earlier class systems: behind its rhetoric lay the “true despotic and brutal nature of all states, regardless of their form of government.” The new system is “completely identical” to modern states like Prussia; its reliance on “armed force” in its “home affairs” is the “the last argument of all threatened political leaders against the masses,” whose interests necessarily clashed with those of the elite.

The “dictatorship of the proletariat” was not even a new system, strictly speaking, but a *variety* of capitalism which Kropotkin termed “centralized state-capitalism.”⁶⁴ Under such a system, Bakunin says, the state is “the only

58 I. Szelenyi and B. Martin, “The Three Waves of New Class Theories,” *Theory and Society* 17, no. 5 (1988): 646–647.

59 Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 331–333.

60 M. Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx” [1872], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 318–319.

61 Ibid.

62 Bakunin, “Letter to *La Liberté*,” 284.

63 Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx,” 319–321.

64 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 170, 186.

banker, capitalist, organizer, and director of all national labor, and the distributor of its products,”⁶⁵ and “regimented workingmen and women will sleep, wake, work, and live to the beat of a drum.”⁶⁶ This kind of state could never wither away, since, rather than progressively abolishing classes, it would instead comprise a central pillar of *minority* class rule, a dictatorship *over* the proletariat and peasantry.

Bakunin’s discussion of postcolonial states, although less well-known than his predictions about the class character of the systems classical Marxists sought to establish, is also instructive. Speaking of Serbia—which, at the time, had recently gained independence from Turkey—Bakunin insisted that new ruling groups can emerge through the state itself *even without taking direct control of the means of production*. In the wake of independence there were “no nobles, no big landowners, no industrialists, and no very wealthy merchants.”⁶⁷ The educated young patriots who occupied the new state quickly became a “new bureaucratic aristocracy” driven by the “iron logic” of their position into becoming “cynical bureaucratic martinets” and enemies of the people. It is clear from this analysis that it is control of those core resources centralized in the state—the means of coercion and administration—that provided the basis for the “bureaucratic aristocracy” to emerge, and, further, that their position at the head of the state forced them (with “iron logic”) into class conflict with the popular classes they dominated and exploited.

What general principles can be extracted from this discussion regarding the anarchist analysis of class and state? First, it is important to note that anarchists do not actually mean precisely the same thing as the Marxists when they invoke the concept of “class.” For Bakunin, the class system was not defined simply in economic terms—that is, in terms of *relations of production*—but also had to be understood in terms of *relations of domination*; not just in terms of inequitable ownership of the *means of production*, but also in terms of ownership of the *means of coercion* (the capacity to physically enforce decisions) and of *administration* (the instruments that govern society).⁶⁸ It is only possible to understand the anarchist claim that a state must (with “iron logic”) generate a new ruling class, and that state managers are themselves part of

65 Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,” 217.

66 Bakunin, “Letter to *La Liberté*,” 284.

67 Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 343.

68 I am expressing the basic anarchist theses on class here in as precise and abbreviated a conceptual language as possible. Different writers have used different terminology at different times to express the same ideas, some emphasizing the relations of domination, others the relations of production, but few embracing a simple economic model of class.

a ruling class and not mere servants of a ruling class *external* to the state, by recognizing that class is envisaged here in relation to ownership or control of one or more of the aforementioned core resources. A ruling class is not just an economically dominant class; indeed, members have no direct relation at all to the means of production.

Under classical capitalism, these two axes of class power can be fairly closely mapped onto two distinct organizations that centralize resources into the hands of economic and political elites—viz., the corporation (which wields the means of production) and the state (which wields the means of administration and coercion). In such a situation, the ruling class comprises both the private capitalists and landlords as well as the state managers, including the state bureaucracy and the judicial, police, and military forces, respectively. Although the two main sectors require each other insofar as they have convergent interests, they also have substantial autonomy from each other on the basis of independent power resources. (This is a simplified model, of course, since even in classical capitalism the picture is complicated by the existence of, for example, state capitalist corporations alongside private ones.)

Bakunin made it clear that although the capitalists, whether state or private, are part of the ruling class, they are not necessarily always the *dominant* part. Bakunin instead sketched out at least three modern variant forms of the classical capitalism schema outlined above: state-capitalism, where the capitalists and the state managers are fused into a single state apparatus; underdeveloped postcolonial capitalism, where the state itself is a source of accumulation but accumulates through taxation, corruption, and nepotism rather than capitalist exploitation; and semi-industrial capitalism, where, alongside the capitalists and state managers, a third ruling class sector exist comprised of landlords who exploit peasants through rents and levies.

The deeper point that should not be lost is that class is partly about relations of production and partly about relations of domination and neither is simply the consequence of the other. These relations are intertwined, although distinct. Private ownership of the means of production can only be used for exploitation if buttressed by relations of domination, whereas monopoly of the means of coercion and administration requires the financing provided by economic exploitation. The state apparatus provides the state managers with an independent resource base that enables their empowerment and enrichment. Economic power allows individuals access to state power, but state power allows individuals access to economic power as well. And, while the political and economic elites wield different resources, their interests are convergent and mutually reinforcing but not identical. For example, wars may arise from geopolitical rather than economic considerations and lead both to interruptions in

production as well as the appropriation through taxation of a greater proportion of the proceeds of exploitation, each of which is to the immediate detriment of the economic elite. Given the rejection of economic determinism and the proposition that the state has its own irreducible dynamics, neither the primacy of relations of production over relations of domination nor—where these groups are distinct—of economic elites over political elites can be established.

Stages, Teleology, and Transitions

The anarchists were not just skeptical of the analytical apparatus of historical materialism but also of the model of historical progress—specifically, the vision of a natural arc to history—with which it is closely associated. For Kropotkin, this model is infused with Hegelian “metaphysical fictions” that imbue history with a unified logic, progressive character, and definite end goal.⁶⁹ These “metaphysical formulae” had no rational or scientific basis, lacked basic proofs, and ignored “social life ... [which is] incomparably more complicated, and incomparably more interesting for practical purposes.”⁷⁰ It was certainly possible, Kropotkin argued, to develop a single overarching theory of society, but for him this involved the “natural-scientific method, the method of induction and deduction” rather than “metaphysics.”⁷¹

Bakunin argued that the Marxist model of a progressive history working towards set goals required serious misreading of actual history. The vision of economic progress spelled out in this model was demonstrably inaccurate. Not only are there intellectual, cultural, political, and other factors that have independent effects on the course of events, that many of these effects are economically retrogressive. As an example, Bakunin cited the negative impact of wars and fanaticism on learning in the ancient world, including the destruction of the Library of Alexandria in Egypt.⁷² The Marxist model rests, accordingly, on a conflation of what *did* happen with what *had* to happen, and—since history was viewed as essentially progressive—a tendency to conflate what had to happen with what *should* happen. However, much of what did happen was contingent rather than inevitable, arising from complicated multi-causal social processes. Moreover, it was often not progressive when

69 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 150–152.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., 150–154.

72 Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx,” 310–311.

considered in terms of the expansion of forces of production, reason, morality, freedom, peace, or any other reasonable measure. History does not always move forward; it often moves backwards or sideways as well. And since there is no single path, there are no by-ways or cul-de-sacs.

With regard to ethics and political strategy, Bakunin also argued that treating essentially contingent events as desirable because they supposedly confirmed a (non-existent) grand arc of history was problematic. The “necessity of dying when one is bitten by a mad dog” is real, but the desirability of the death is questionable and its contribution to progress dubious. Although many events in history appear in retrospect to be unavoidable, they must still be condemned “with all the energy of which we are capable in the interest of our social and individual morality.”⁷³

According to Bakunin, Marx’s view of history led him to politically questionable judgments on current affairs. Since Marx believed that the “modern, military, bureaucratic state”—no less than capitalism—aided the “slow, but always progressive” movement of history, he was compelled to view the “triumph of the centralized, despotic state” over feudal peasant uprisings as a possibly tragic but certainly “essential condition for the coming Social Revolution.”⁷⁴

The same logic lent itself to a conditional support for imperialism. Although Bakunin does not seem to have alluded to Marx’s controversial writings on British rule in India or the United States’ annexation of California, he certainly recalled his debates with Marx and Engels in the 1840s, at which time he was a radical pan-Slavist fighting for decolonization in Eastern Europe. Marx and Engels had specifically opposed a range of independence movements as futile and regressive struggles by “non-historic” peoples who required, instead, the civilizing influences of Germanic rule.⁷⁵ It is true that Bakunin did not resist the obvious temptation to label Marx a German nationalist and a bigot. However, this cheap shot should not obscure Bakunin’s core argument. Unlike many nationalist and “postcolonial” theorists who read Marx’s and Engels’ positions on colonialism as examples of a universally shared, “Orientalist” and racist European outlook, Bakunin understood that their positions were very much the products of their own very specific theoretical model.

73 Ibid., 311.

74 Ibid., 309–310.

75 M. Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 58.

Marx and Engels supported (or opposed) specific developments on the basis of whether they advanced the prospects for a universal socialist revolution. Since the very bridge to socialism lay in the progress of capitalism and the associated rise of the working class movement, whatever advanced capitalist development for *all* of humanity was to be welcomed. It was this logic, rather than some monolithic “white” worldview, that led Marx and Engels to oppose independence for some European nationalities (e.g., the Czechs in 1848) yet support it for others (e.g., the Irish in 1870); to defend (Asian) Turkish rule over (European) Slavs (in 1855 and 1879); to support the Germans “thrashing” the French in 1870;⁷⁶ and to dismiss the German peasant risings of 1525 as “achieving nothing.”⁷⁷ Clearly neither race nor culture was the determining factor in these Marxist judgments. What mattered rather, was how these developments fit into the march of history. Bakunin, the anarchist, opposed the reasoning involved, the political conclusions drawn, and the moral positions taken; there were few horrors, he suggested, that could not be justified in the name of historical progress.

Classical Marxists never denied that peasants could play a revolutionary role or contribute to a “magnificent revolutionary effort.”⁷⁸ They argued, rather, that exploited classes like slaves, serfs, and peasants were intrinsically unable to undertake the progressive reconstruction of the social order. They were fragmented by the conditions of production, being dispersed across vast territories in largely agrarian economies, isolated into small and autonomous production units like farms, and unified primarily by the coercion of the ruling classes. Very difficult to organize, their political horizons were narrow; they sought withdrawal into autarchic family farms and workshops, free of external impositions like taxes, tithes, and rents, rather than a cooperative and universal social order based on systematic technological advance. Indeed, not only were the rebellions of such classes unlikely to succeed, but their successes could easily damage the forces of production.

Peasants form a class, said Marx, only in the sense of having common “economic conditions of existence.” Because they have “merely a local interconnection,” they are “consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name.”⁷⁹ Only under the leadership of *other* revolutionary classes—first,

76 F. Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of his Life* [1936] (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951), 438–441.

77 F. Engels, “The Peasant War in Germany” [1850], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 10, 480–482.

78 *Ibid.*, 478.

79 K. Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” [1852], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 11, 187.

the bourgeoisie, in the struggle against feudalism, and later, the proletariat, in the struggle against capitalism—can forces such as the peasantry play a revolutionary role. Lacking leadership from outside, it was inevitable that the peasant rebels of 1525 would achieve “nothing.”

The progressive role of capitalism, accordingly, has three main elements: first, capitalism uproots feudalism by means of bourgeois—democratic revolutions; second, it creates the only social force that is capable of abolishing the modern proletariat; and third, through its relentless development of the forces of production it creates the material basis for a society without want. The modern proletariat—centralized into large production units that required cooperation to operate, gathered in cities, deskilled, exploited, and oppressed—had both the capacity and the imperative to unite on a large scale and envisage and institute a radically different socialist future.

Meanwhile, Marx and Engels argued, the competitive drive of the capitalist mode of production developed the forces of production to the level required for an egalitarian post-scarcity society while simultaneously laying the foundations for the rational economic planning required. The revolutionary tasks of the proletarian state—the centralization of the means of production in state hands, the institution of a planned economy, and the defeat of counter-revolutionary forces—were facilitated by the evolution of capitalism into large oligopolies which themselves practice central planning and, in so doing, render capitalism and capitalists superfluous. This is the “abolition of capital as private property within the framework of the capitalist mode of production itself.”⁸⁰ Such a situation would, they insisted, enable an exploited class, for the first time, to take power and install a new, more advanced mode of production. As the capitalist class shrinks and the intermediate classes fall away; as the proletariat expands, its internal divisions decline and it advances from unions to the formation of a Communist Party, and from there to the seizure of state power. Since this outcome was essential and desirable, as claimed above, the development of the capitalist mode of production was historically necessary and progressive: whatever the crimes committed in its pursuit, it was “the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.”⁸¹ This was not a prognosis with which the anarchists were comfortable.

Firstly, there was an important difference with the analysis of what Marxists called bourgeois-democratic revolutions. Kropotkin agreed with the argument that the rising bourgeoisie sought and secured major changes, such as

80 K. Marx, “Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. III” [1894], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 37, 434.

81 K. Marx, “The British Rule in India” [1853], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 10, 132.

free markets and capitalist-run parliaments, through events like the French Revolution.⁸² But he insisted that the peasantry and the workers were independent agents in these struggles and radicalized by them.⁸³ In the French case, their appropriation of Enlightenment ideas as well as the promises of the revolution impelled them to seek far more radical changes, including republicanism. Through direct action they implemented measures such as the massive redistribution of feudal estates, local universal suffrage, and tax reforms. These went far beyond the original bourgeois plan, which, sought to forge a compromise with feudalism, as in the case of the English Revolution. In other words, there was nothing intrinsically “democratic” about bourgeois revolutions, since the democratic elements came to a large extent from outside the bourgeoisie and worked against it, and the bourgeoisie responded with manipulation and repression wherever possible, including through alliances with feudal forces and subversion.⁸⁴

The anarchists also leveled a range of specific criticisms against Marx’s analysis of the dynamics of capitalism itself which also question the notion that capitalism builds a bridge to socialism. However, it is essential to stress here that there is no absolute break between anarchist and Marxist economic analyses, in the sense that the anarchist tradition critically appropriated Marx’s economic theory in order to develop its own insights into economics. Thus it is said that anarchism includes both “Proudhonian politics and Marxian economics.”⁸⁵ The relationship between classical Marxism and the broad anarchist tradition in this regard was by no means as polarized as is sometimes assumed. The theory of exploitation through the wage system described by the anarchists was essentially identical to that of the Marxists.⁸⁶ For example, Bakunin’s stated quibble with Marx’s *Capital* was that it was written in a style quite incomprehensible to the average worker.⁸⁷ He began a Russian translation of the book in the 1870s, having completed the first Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto* in the 1860s.⁸⁸ Kropotkin despised Marx, but his

82 P. Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973* [1909], 2 vols. (London: Elephant Editions, 1986), vol. 1, 26–29.

83 Ibid., 22–23, 34–5, 114–128, 148, 162–165, 193, 200–214, 261–263, 277–280, 287–289; Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, vol. 2, 373–380, 390–398, 451, 504–528.

84 Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, vol. 1, 209–214, 224–232, 239–245, 260–264, 278–280; Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, vol. 2, 304–316, 360–372, 570–574, 593–595.

85 Kenafick, “The Life of Bakunin,” 15.

86 P. Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* [1892] (London, Elephant Editions, 1990), 56, 58, 139.

87 M. Bakunin, *The Capitalist System* [1871] (Champaign, Ill.: Libertarian Labor Review, 1993), note 2.

88 K. Marx and F. Engels, “Preface to the Second Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*” [1882], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 24, 425.

understanding of class struggle, exploitation, and capitalist crisis was deeply influenced by Marxist economics.⁸⁹ Malatesta, who complained that anarchism was too “impregnated with Marxism,”⁹⁰ did not develop an alternative economic analysis but instead implicitly used Marxist categories and models. His comrade Carlo Cafiero published a summary of Marx’s *Capital*.

For Marx, capitalism’s dynamism in developing the forces of production was a function of competition.⁹¹ Given the premise that the market price of a commodity fundamentally corresponds to the socially necessary amount of labor time required for its production, price competition required reductions in labor time expended. This led to a continual restructuring of labor processes as well the growing importance of machinery in production. Given that unpaid labor time, or exploitation via the wage system, was the source of the surplus value that underlies profits and was therefore the core fund for these investments, the continual decline in labor time expended tended to decrease the rate of profit. Partly to compensate for this, capitalists invested in new sectors where the rate of profit was initially higher but would eventually succumb to the very same processes.

A further problem is the disparity between production and consumption. Uncoordinated production by competing capital leads to more being produced than can be sold, which prevents the realization of the surplus value embodied in the commodities. This was the problem of “overproduction.” Over time, Marx argued, capitalism would undergo an ever-growing concentration and centralization; this would lead to a situation of oligopoly, or even monopoly, in which central planning, including price-fixing, would both anticipate the features of the new socialist system as well as signal the exhaustion of the capitalist mode of production as the competitive drive faded. At this stage, capitalism became an active brake on the further development of the forces of production.

Kropotkin’s critique of this model involved a seemingly innocuous point about prices. Marx’s price theory depended on a version of the labor theory of value according to which prices were rooted in objective processes in the sphere of production. Labor power—the capacity to work—was a commodity sold for wages by the worker to the employer for a period of time. Although its market value could fluctuate a bit, its cost was fundamentally set by the

89 See, for example, Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 168.

90 Guérin, “Marxism and Anarchism,” 117–118.

91 There are numerous general guides to Marxist theory, but core original texts include K. Marx, *Value, Price and Profit: Addressed to Working Men* [1865] and K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I* [1867].

labor time required to produce the workers who embodied it. Neo-classical economic liberals, partly in response, articulated the theory of marginal utility, which stated that prices are entirely rooted in individual preferences under given market conditions—that is, in subjective processes in the sphere of circulation. Wage levels, as such, are set by individual actions in markets, and even the costs required to produce labor power reflect essentially subjective actions in prior markets for food, heat and the like.

Kropotkin did not deny the importance of labor time in shaping prices, nor did he discount the effect that market conditions could have on wage rates. But he stressed that wage rates were determined by a wide variety of other factors as well. For prices generally, “Many other factors come about in a capitalist society, so as to alter the simple relation that may have existed once between labour and exchange value.”⁹² These included government policies, the relative profitability of particular industries, and, last but not least, *power relations*, including the balance of forces between classes, the power of particular states in world markets, and popular action, including the ability of skilled and professional employees to establish skill monopolies⁹³ and the pressure of unions and strikes, most effectively generated by a “great union of all possible trades.”⁹⁴

Prices, then, were fundamentally affected by powerful organizations including states, monopolies, and cartels alongside those craft and industrial unions associated with the sectors of capital and labor. In other words, prices had less to do with exchange values based on socially necessary levels of labor time, or with use values arising from individual preferences, than with the “relative economic, military and social power held by the respective parties,” which “skew[s] the relative ‘value’ of commodities, or at least of the price that can be gotten for them.”⁹⁵

Here it is important to note that Bakunin and Kropotkin consistently described capitalism as a system centred on large monopolies, oligopolies and cartels.⁹⁶ Far from being outcomes of a dynamic capitalism in which large firms consume smaller rivals, the highly centralized structure of capital arose from state actions like enclosures, privatization licenses, and subsidies made “in favor of capitalists at home, and still more in conquered lands, such as

92 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 91.

93 Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 36–37, 165–166, 184.

94 P. Kropotkin, “1st May 1891,” in *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology*, ed. I. McKay (Oakland, Calif.: AK Press, 2011), 328–329, 331.

95 J. Bekken, “Peter Kropotkin’s Anarchist Economics for a New Society,” in *Radical Economics and Labor: Essays in Honor of the IWW Centennial*, eds. F. Lee and J. Bekken (New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.

96 Bakunin, “On the Cooperative Movement,” in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 399.

Egypt, Tonkin, the Transvaal, and so on.”⁹⁷ As Kropotkin explicitly states, this means there was *never* a period of free markets in capitalism, since such state interventions have always been the norm.

Although the anarchists agreed with the Marxists that capitalism was wracked with periodic crises of overproduction leading to unemployment and depressed wages,⁹⁸ they nonetheless argued that there were two important counter-tendencies. First, large monopolies, oligopolies, and cartels not only shaped prices but were also able to “constantly reduce the output by restraining production,” both deliberately and indirectly.⁹⁹ Second, as Kropotkin contended, capitalism entailed systematic *underproduction* insofar as it continually created obstacles to creativity and productivity through alienating work, low wages, unequal and ineffective education, damaged health, and low morale. This exemplified the basically wasteful nature of the system: people, equipment, and raw materials lay idle despite pressing social needs,¹⁰⁰ while the forces of production that were used were more often than not used inefficiently. Taken together, these points suggest that capitalism is based on an unjust and inefficient distribution as well as distorted production geared primarily to producing for profit, war, and the luxury and power of ruling minorities.¹⁰¹

This has enormous implications for the analysis of capitalism. If, on the one hand, the law of value under capitalism is *systematically* deformed by power relations, and, on the other, capitalism is characterized by monopolies and oligopolies *throughout* its existence and not just towards the end of its epoch, then neither price competition nor the relentless expansion of forces of production are central features of capitalism, which instead relies on restricted and distorted development. This strongly undermines the classical Marxist notion of capitalism as a progressive mode of production that lays the foundation for a transition to socialism. The anarchists also gainsaid the Marxist claim that the rise of large companies would involve the inevitable eclipse of small firms. Small and medium-sized firms continue to exist in capitalism and are even expanding in numbers, often as contractors to the big firms.¹⁰² Not receiving the same privileges from the state as the giant companies that dominate

97 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 97–98.

98 P. Kropotkin, “Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles” [1887], in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets*, 55–56.

99 Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 36, 102.

100 Ibid., 36–37; Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 167–168.

101 Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 37–38.

102 Kropotkin, “1st May 1891,” 329–330; E. Malatesta, *Fra Contadini: A Dialogue on Anarchy* [1883], trans. J. Weir (London: Bratach Dubh Editions, 1981), 40n2; Tcherkesoff, *Pages of Socialist History*, 23–38.

markets,¹⁰³ the small firms are based on ruthless “sweating” and act as a “counterweight” on wage gains in the “larger industries.”¹⁰⁴ In short, these firms are not an alternative to the big firms but their complements. The history of capitalism, accordingly, was not about an evolution from competitive to monopoly capitalism, since the system has always been supported by the state as well as smaller proxies and, to this extent, has always been monopolistic.

Agency, States and Strategy

These larger analytical issues play a critical role in the formulation of both classical Marxist and anarchist strategies and tactics. Both traditions are fundamentally concerned with changing the world, and both link their larger theories, whether implicitly or explicitly, to their projects for change. This dimension in Marxism is well-known: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”¹⁰⁵ For anarchism it is less often recognized, partly because many discussions of the its relationship to Marxism have focused on strategic differences, ignoring the larger theoretical issues in which these differences are embedded, or else are simply abysmally ignorant about anarchism.¹⁰⁶

The relationship between the theoretical and the strategic dimensions is complex in both traditions. Despite their theoretical stress on the inevitability of socialism, for example, classical Marxists have never been content to simply await its coming. On the contrary, they have repeatedly stressed the importance of constructing revolutionary political parties armed with the correct strategy and tactics as a necessary condition for the conquest of state power. Arguing against Bakunin, for example, Marx insisted that “the proletariat can only act as a class by turning itself into a political party” that must aim at the “conquest of state power” and create a “proletarian dictatorship” based upon “centralization” and “force.”¹⁰⁷ With Engels, he stressed that this state would

103 Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 133–134.

104 Kropotkin, “1st May 1891,” 330.

105 K. Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” [1845], *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, 5. Emphases in original.

106 A notable caricature can be found in H. Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, Vol. IV: Critique of Other Socialisms* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 108–170.

107 From the resolutions sponsored by Marx and Engels at the 1872 Hague conference of the First International, in Gerth, *The First International*, 216–217, 285–286.

nationalize the economy and employ labor.¹⁰⁸ For Kautsky, similarly, “the social revolution for which the proletariat strives cannot be realized until it shall have captured political power,” and this requires a “great organized party.”¹⁰⁹

Lenin insisted that a Marxist is one “who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat,” and this requires “centralized organization of force, of violence,” and “undivided power.”¹¹⁰ For Stalin, similarly, “our party ... does not share and cannot share the guidance of the state with any other party,” and “[t]his is what we call the dictatorship of the proletariat.”¹¹¹ Mao, too, asserted that he who refuses to recognize that the “leadership of the Communist Party and the state power of the people’s dictatorship” are necessary for revolutionary change “is no communist.”¹¹² There is an obvious and real continuity between these conceptions in the classical Marxist tradition. Indeed, a substantial body of work warns against attempts to set up neat breaks between, for example, Marx and Engels,¹¹³ Kautsky and Lenin,¹¹⁴ or, for that matter, Trotsky and Stalin.¹¹⁵ This does not mean there was no change and innovation over time, but it does signal that one-party Marxist-Leninist states cannot be dismissed as a “Stalinist” deviation from “real” Marxism, as they are the only historic examples of revolutionary Marxist states in history and the reference point for the vast majority of Marxists in the twentieth century.

Long before his exile, Trotsky insisted that the Bolshevik party had “the final word in all fundamental questions,” that the regime was built

108 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 40, 55–56.

109 Kautsky, *The Road to Power*, 5–6, 64.

110 Lenin, “The State and Revolution,” 255, 261–262.

111 J. Stalin, “The Party’s Three Fundamental Slogans on the Peasant Problem” [1927], in *Leninism: Selected Writings*, 42.

112 Mao, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” 372.

113 Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*, 250–286.

114 L.T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: ‘What is to be Done?’ in Context* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008); L.T. Lih, “‘The New Era of War and Revolution’: Lenin, Kautsky, Hegel and the Outbreak of World War I,” in *Cataclysm 1914*, ed. A. Anievas (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 366–412.

115 For more on these issues, see, for example, V.G. Devinatz, “Lenin as Scientific Manager under Monopoly Capitalism, State Capitalism, and Socialism: A Response to Scoville,” *Industrial Relations* 42, no. 3 (2003): 513–520; S. Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (London: Polity, 1990); J.E. Marot, “Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Rise of Stalinism: Theory and Practice,” *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 3 (2006): 175–206; van der Walt, “Counterpower, Participatory Democracy, Revolutionary Defence,” 193–207; E. van Ree, “Socialism in One Country: A Reassessment,” *Studies in East European Thought* 50, no. 2 (1998): 77–117.

on “the unquestioned authority of the party, and the faultlessness of its discipline,”¹¹⁶ and that the party was “entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy.”¹¹⁷ Many years later he continued to defend the “revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party,” rather than of the whole proletariat, as an “objective necessity”¹¹⁸ and to insist that the Soviet Union was “transitional” to socialism, marked by major “social conquests” and revolutionary social relations.¹¹⁹

These continuities, including statist and party-centered conceptions of change, were integral to classical Marxism. But this model of transition, Bakunin noted, gestured at an unremarked anomaly in Marxist thinking—viz., that Marx’s insistence that socialist transition entails a revolutionary state expropriating and suppressing the capitalist owners of the means of production fits uneasily within his own materialist model. Marx claimed that states were part of the superstructure, a *reflection* of the base, yet his strategy hinged on using the superstructure to *change* the base by revolutionizing the relations of production—in which case the state is not simply a reflection of the base after all.¹²⁰

For Bakunin and Kropotkin, as we have noted, states are institutions through which ruling class minorities maintain their power and, for this reason, are necessarily centralized. This, coupled with the fact that states have irreducible elitist dynamics of its own, implies that they are incapable of undoing class-based social relations. As a hierarchical system of territorial rule that *necessarily* concentrates power in the hands of a few and defends class system in the interests of capitalists, landlords, *and* state managers, a revolutionary state would simply create a new elite: “All States rule, all governments being by their very nature placed outside the people, must necessarily seek to subject it to customs and purposes entirely foreign to it.”¹²¹

Rejecting the notion of a democratic “workers state” as impossible, the anarchists instead advocated for a revolution involving the abolition of corporations,

116 L. Trotsky, *In Defence of Terrorism (Terrorism and Communism): A Reply To Karl Kautsky* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1921), 99.

117 Quoted in I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 508–509.

118 L. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936–37*, 2nd edition (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), 513–514.

119 L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1937), 47, 254–255.

120 Bakunin, “Letter to *La Liberté*,” 281–282.

121 Bakunin *Marxism, Freedom and the State*, 63.

landlordism, and states, with the oppressed classes “organized from below upwards by means” of their “own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians.”¹²² In such a situation, the means of administration, coercion, and production would be placed under the common ownership and democratic coordination of the oppressed classes themselves. Given that class divisions entail monopolies of the foregoing, class would be abolished in such a system, and the dynamics of capitalist rivalry and state geopolitical conflict would disappear. It was essential, said Kropotkin, to “attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralize, to dissolve authority ... [through] a truly popular revolution.”¹²³ If the whole proletariat was actually elevated to “stand at the head of the government,” Bakunin argued, there would be “no government, no state.”¹²⁴ Either the Marxist “dictatorship of the proletariat” meant rule by a minority, in which case it was unacceptable as a revolutionary project, or else it meant generalized popular power, in which case the Marxist promise that it would later wither away made no sense.¹²⁵ A system in which the masses govern directly, with direct control over the means of administration, coercion and production, is necessarily a system without a state.

Given the anarchist analysis of class and state, any revolution that seeks to use the state will inevitably serve to maintain an institution antithetical to the logic of participatory democracy and self-management. To retain the state is to retain a class-based system that excludes the majority from governance.¹²⁶ The classical Marxist approach, which effectively merges the state with the corporations and landlords through a program of nationalization and centralized planning, entails a “revolution by decrees” that will “only perpetuate that which they were supposed to destroy”¹²⁷—i.e., the domination and exploitation of the popular classes by a minority class. The sincerity of the revolutionaries was not at issue; rather, the very use of the state machine imposed an “iron logic” that made state managers “enemies of the people.”¹²⁸ Activists do not change the state; the state changes them. As Bakunin once commented:

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ P. Kropotkin, “Representative Government” [1885] in *Words of a Rebel: Peter Kropotkin*, ed. G. Woodcock (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 143.

¹²⁴ Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 330.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 331–332.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 337.

¹²⁷ Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,” 193–194. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁸ Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 343.

"Take the most sincere democrat and put him on the throne; if he does not step down promptly, he will surely become a scoundrel."¹²⁹

Marxists have traditionally offered three primary justifications for the revolutionary state—viz., expropriation of the capitalists, economic coordination, and military defense of the revolution. The anarchist model of change, by contrast, centered on the construction of "social and economic equality" which was "established in the world by the spontaneous organization of labor and the collective ownership of property by freely organized producers' associations, and by the equally spontaneous federation of communes, to replace the domineering paternalistic State"¹³⁰ from the bottom up.¹³¹ The State, Kropotkin insisted, "having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organizing their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy those privileges."¹³²

Both insurrectionist and mass anarchism advocated building a popular movement based on counter-power (i.e., popular organizations that could resist, and eventually supplant, the ruling class) and counter-culture (i.e., a counter-hegemonic worldview). This movement would prefigure the new society; it would also seek to generate a radical rupture within the current social order rather than a gradual transition, since only through this revolution from below could the ruling class be cast down, and classes, states and oppression more generally be abolished. For the mass anarchists, this project required a slow, patient project of mass organization and education, not least through struggles for immediate reforms and the accumulation of capacity over time. Syndicalism featured centrally in the armory of mass anarchism. Bakunin, for example, argued for a revolutionary unionism that could "erect upon the ruins of the old world the free federation of workers' associations," sowing "the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world"¹³³ and giving rise to a "serious international organization of workers' associations of all lands capable of replacing this departing world of *states*."¹³⁴ For Kropotkin, it was essential to build up workers' resistance, solidarity, and consciousness in the unions with the ultimate goal of creating a "vast workers' organization" to

¹²⁹ M. Bakunin, "Revolutionary Catechism" [1866], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 91.

¹³⁰ Bakunin, "The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State," 262.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹³² Kropotkin, "Modern Science and Anarchism," 170.

¹³³ M. Bakunin, "The Program of the Alliance" [1871], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 255.

¹³⁴ M. Bakunin, "The Policy of the International" [1869], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 174. Emphasis in original.

pursue the “goal of the revolution ... expropriation of the holders of society’s wealth”—doing so if necessary “over the corpse of the bourgeoisie.”¹³⁵

For anarchists, neither states nor statist political parties will change society. The movement for change has to contain within itself core values that anticipate the form and content of the society that it seeks to create—for example, class consciousness, solidarity, opposition to oppression, internal democracy, self-management, and self-activity. For Bakunin, the logic of the state was top-down, authoritarian, and stifling; the state itself was “a vast slaughterhouse or enormous cemetery, where all the real aspirations, all the living forces of a country enter generously and happily” but are ultimately “slain and buried.”¹³⁶ The fact that means shape ends explains why a statist project centred on political parties cannot really rid society of its current class-ridden and hierarchical character.

For Kropotkin it was essential to identify the ultimate aims and then to “specify a proposed course of action *in conformity with the end*.” Political parties aiming at state power reflected neither the means nor the ends “[anarchists] are working for.”¹³⁷ The revolution had to be “a widespread popular movement” in which the masses in “every town and village ... take upon themselves the task of rebuilding society” through associations founded on democratic and anti-hierarchical principles.¹³⁸ Looking to political leaders or the state itself for freedom is simply preparing the ground for the rise of a ruling class. “Free workers require a free organization,” one that is based on “free agreement and free cooperation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual to the all-pervading influence of a state.”¹³⁹

While opposing all such statist projects, reformist and revolutionary alike, the anarchists were deeply troubled by the Marxist tendency to substitute the revolutionary party for the proletariat. Bakunin predicted that, in the event of capturing state power, “Mr. Marx and his friends” would “liberate” the masses in “their own way” by establishing “despotic control” over the populace and treating it as a “regimented herd.”¹⁴⁰ This was, in part, simply a restatement of

135 P. Kropotkin, “Workers’ Organization” [1881], in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 304–306, 311.

136 Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,” 269.

137 Kropotkin, “Workers’ Organization,” 303–304.

138 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 188.

139 Kropotkin, “Anarchist Communism,” 52.

140 Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 331–332.

the arguments already made against the use of the state, including the notion that a new elite might claim to be “ruling in the name of knowledge.”¹⁴¹

It is clear from the context that Bakunin was referring to the notion that Marxism was a uniquely “scientific” socialism which alone represented the working class and whose very victory was foreordained by history. The Communists, said Marx and Engels, “always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole,” are “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country,” and “have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.”¹⁴² Taking by itself, such a perspective is not terribly different from that of the anarchists, who certainly viewed themselves as being champions of the oppressed classes armed with a superior analysis and outlook. More generally, every person who takes up and defends a particular political position—even if that position is completely relativistic in character—takes for granted that his or own view is superior to rivals’ view and so should inform action. For anarchists, however, Marxists made two additional claims that implied the complete substitution of party for class: first, that Marxism *alone* represented “always and everywhere” the interests and program of the working class, and that anarchism and other rival ideologies, by extension, variously represented feudal forces, the ruined peasantry,¹⁴³ capitalist “henchmen,” and assorted “*bourgeois* trends” “irreconcilably opposed” to socialism¹⁴⁴; and second, that the Marxist party itself was the only legitimate instrument for the seizure of state power and, more precisely, the formation of a centralized state based on force and “undivided power.”¹⁴⁵

Since state power can only be held by minorities, this also means, effectively, that the state is captured by the *leadership* of the party (in Bakunin’s day, “Mr. Marx and his friends”; in later days, Lenin and others). Armed with the theory that the party alone represented the working class, committed to centralized “dictatorship”, and operating without real restraint, it was not a long step for Marxists to the view that all critics were not just ill-informed, but represented hostile class enemies and agents of counter-revolution that required suppression. This means that the party leadership would objectively qualify as “enemies of the people” they exploited and dominated and would quickly move

141 Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx,” 318–319.

142 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 39–41.

143 Ibid., 58–78.

144 V.I. Lenin, “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government” [1918], in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, 599. Emphasis in original.

145 Lenin, “The State and Revolution,” 255.

to suppress all peasant and working class dissent as counter-revolutionary. In this way, “despotic control” by a new elite might *claim* to be “rul[e] in the name of knowledge”—in other words, that *Marxist* knowledge as decided and authorized by the party ideologues would be used to justify substitutionism and authoritarianism.

Those who have sought to cleanse Marx of the taint of the Russian *gulag* have placed much emphasis on the fact that he only rarely used the phrase “dictatorship of the proletariat,” and then only in ambiguous ways.¹⁴⁶ But Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s charge that classical Marxist strategies were bound to end in dictatorship by a new class makes almost no reference to this phrase. Nor did the anarchists claim that Marx specifically and overtly advocated a one-party state and dictatorship. Rather, they argued that Marxist reasoning lent itself to a conflation of (working) class and (Marxist) party, and that this would be reinforced by a second element in Marxist strategy—viz., the merger of the party and the state, with that state centralizing in itself all administration, coercion, and production.

Taken together, this would lead to a substitution of the class by the party as well as the use of the party against the class. Under a party-state committed to suppressing counter-revolution, it is difficult to see how any disagreement with the ruling party—the self-declared historic representative of the proletariat, armed with infallible “scientific” doctrine—would be possible. Regardless of whether Marx or Engels explicitly or implicitly conceived the “dictatorship of the proletariat” as rule by a small revolutionary elite, for anarchists this is precisely the sort of regime Marxism generates. As G.P. Maximoff writes: “it follows logically that terror has to be applied against all, save a very small handful of the ‘vanguard of the proletariat’ organized into a party,” which in reality entails “the dictatorship of the [party] leaders.”¹⁴⁷

By contrast, the anarchists argued that in their revolutionary socialist democracy there would be genuine democratic rights, including the right, within the norms of the democracy, to openly disagree with, and even campaign against, the democracy. Not only would these rights be made substantive by an egalitarian social order, but there would be “absolute and complete” freedom to “voice all opinions” without reprisals, as well as freedom of association, including of associations promoting “the undermining (or destruction) of individual and public freedom.”¹⁴⁸ The system would be politically pluralistic

146 See, for example, H. Draper, *The ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ from Marx to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), chapter 1.

147 G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia: The Leninist Counter Revolution* [1940] (Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1979), 19–20, 257.

148 Bakunin, “Revolutionary Catechism,” 79.

and there would be no conflation of party rule and popular rule. Anarchists, predominant *ideologically* only to the extent that their views were widely and freely accepted, would oppose “all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people” by “cliques or individuals.”¹⁴⁹ Informed “public opinion,” a reformed education system promoting critical thought and respect for human rights, and clear democratic structures would be the real safeguards.¹⁵⁰

The anarchists did not deny the need for economic coordination; indeed there is an extensive anarchist literature and praxis elaborating how self-managed local units of consumption and production would be linked together by processes of participatory and democratic planning, with Bakunin explicitly arguing for a global plan arising from a vast economic federation of self-managing enterprises and communities.¹⁵¹ For Bakunin, the “future social organization” would be “carried out from the bottom up, by free association, with unions and localities federated by communes, regions, nations, and, finally, a great universal and international federation.”¹⁵²

As for the last argument for using the state, military defense, it is important to stress that the broad anarchist tradition confronted the issue head-on. While a minority, mainly syndicalists, hoped for a “bloodless revolution,” they did not ignore the state; instead, they argued that the generalized occupation and self-management of workplaces would cut material and financial supplies to the state military and enable a subversion of the soldiery.¹⁵³ But most argued for armed revolutionary coordinated self-defense. Bakunin, while advocating the “dissolution of the army, the judicial system ... and “the police” of the current order, argued for “permanent barricades” coordinated by delegates with “always responsible, and always revocable mandates” and the “extension of the revolutionary force” within and between “rebel countries.”¹⁵⁴ This would be part of the “standing federation” integrating the new society through a delegate system and would be part of the effort to “organize a revolutionary force with the capacity of defeating the reaction” and ensuring “the universality of

¹⁴⁹ M. Bakunin, “On the Internal Conduct of the Alliance” in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 387.

¹⁵⁰ Bakunin, “Revolutionary Catechism,” 79, 82.

¹⁵¹ Guérin, *Anarchism*, 55, 153. Notable historical examples include, for example, the anarchist management of the Barcelona water infrastructure in the latter 1930s. See, for example, S. Gorostiza, H. March, and D. Sauri, “Servicing Customers in Revolutionary Times: The Experience of the Collectivized Barcelona Water Company During the Spanish Civil War,” *Antipode* 45, no. 4 (2012): 908–925.

¹⁵² Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,” 270.

¹⁵³ See, for example, R. Chaplin, *The General Strike* (Chicago, 1935).

¹⁵⁴ M. Bakunin, “The Program of the International Brotherhood” [1869], in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, 152–154.

the Revolution,” which had to be international in scope.¹⁵⁵ For Kropotkin, the “supreme honor” was not “dying ... in one’s bed, but in the armed struggle for the emancipation of a people,” a fight carried out by “the masses.”¹⁵⁶ Malatesta viewed the notion of peaceful revolution as “pure utopia,” since revolution is resolved through “main force” with “victory ... to the strongest.”¹⁵⁷

Stages, Capitalism, the Peasantry and National Liberation

The final issue that divided the two traditions concerned historical stages. As I have indicated above, classical Marxists, in practice, never passively awaited the coming of a revolution, delivered by anonymous historical forces. The stages issue, however, also generated major differences (and some odd similarities) in the two traditions’ the approaches to national liberation and anti-imperialist struggles. The stage-centred and teleological model of history that was key to the Marxist theory played a central role in the elaboration of Marxist strategy; it did not displace, but shaped, the action of the Marxist party as a historical force.

For Marx and Engels, the global spread of capitalism was essential to the creation of a universal proletariat, and, in the meantime, the main revolutionary prospects lay in the most advanced capitalist centers in northern and western Europe. Although Kautsky argued in 1909 that the “battle field of the proletarian revolution” was becoming “the whole world,”¹⁵⁸ this did not mean that proletarian revolution was on the actual agenda everywhere. In reality, proletarian-socialist revolution was only an option for the most advanced countries. For less advanced countries, such as though in the backward east and south of Europe as well as in most of the colonial world elsewhere, the immediate task was capitalist modernization through colonial intrusion by advanced powers¹⁵⁹ or else local bourgeois-democratic revolutions. In the early 1900s, for example, Kautsky and Lenin agreed that the struggle in Russia was for a bourgeois-democratic revolution against feudal barriers to trade and industry as well as for agrarian and legal reforms. This was “*in the highest degree*

155 M. Bakunin, “Program and Object of the Secret Revolutionary Organization of the International Brethren” [1868], in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, Book One*, ed. D. Guérin (Oakland, Calif.: AK Press, 1989), 155–156.

156 Kropotkin, “1st May 1891,” 324.

157 E. Malatesta, “Syndicalism: An Anarchist Critique [*Sic*]” [1907] in *The Anarchist Reader*, ed. G. Woodcock (Glasgow: Fontana/ Collins, 1977), 224.

158 Kautsky, *The Road to Power*, 126–127.

159 Marx, “The British Rule in India,” 132.

advantageous to the proletariat."¹⁶⁰ The peasantry could aid this process, although it would be destroyed by the subsequent development of capitalism.¹⁶¹

This sort of reasoning was central to the Second International's focus on Western countries and the negligible role it assigned to the colonial and postcolonial world.¹⁶² Those who wanted socialist revolution in such regions were advised to foster capitalist transition, while securing modest reforms, which left little scope for independent local Marxist activity. Underneath the cloak of stageist orthodoxy, however, there were important developments that laid the foundation for more flexible political practices. The first centered on the theory of changing character of capitalist imperialism; the second centered on the notion that the historic "tasks" of one class might have to be taken up by another; and the third centered on the idea that international conditions might allow some countries to skip stages.

When Marx argued that imperialism could play a progressive role, he stressed that it was bound to generate resistance and insurrection.¹⁶³ Over time, he became more skeptical about the first claim, and more excited by the second. Soon afterwards, Kautsky advised Iranian Marxists to fight for independence in a cross-class alliance including the local capitalists, and also expressed growing doubts about the ability of foreign capitalism to modernize the colonies.¹⁶⁴ Lenin went further, arguing that Western capitalism had entered its final phase by the 1880s: monopoly, stagnation, and decline.¹⁶⁵ This made socialism immediately possible in the advanced countries, but it also implied that their imperialist exploits were no longer a catalyst for the development of the forces of production in the colonial world but a *barrier*. It was easy to draw the conclusion that national independence was now essential to the completion of the capitalist stage, meaning that bourgeois-democratic

160 V.I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" [1905], in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, 451–452. Emphasis in original.

161 G.P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854–1938: Marxism in the Classical Years*, 2nd edition (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 135–136.

162 See L. van der Walt and S.J. Hirsch, "Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism: The Colonial and Post-colonial Experience, 1870–1940," in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, ed. S.J. Hirsch and L. van der Walt (Leiden: Brill, 2010), xxxv.

163 K. Marx, "Investigation of Tortures in India" [1857], in *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, vol. 15, 341.

164 Lih, "The New Era of War and Revolution," 372–374.

165 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* [1917] (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1970).

revolution in the colonial countries was also a national and anti-imperialist revolution.

The early congresses of the Communist International (Comintern, the “Third International, formed 1919) ruled that Marxists must support “revolutionary liberation movements” that were willing to break with imperialism, adding that where capitalism was not “fully developed,” the struggle was primarily a struggle against feudalism and imperialism.¹⁶⁶ It was essential to have “the most radical solution of the tasks of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which aims at the conquest of political independence.”¹⁶⁷ This perspective was affirmed at subsequent congresses, which characterized imperialism as a “parasite.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, for Mao in the 1930s, the “chief targets at this stage of the Chinese revolution” were “imperialism and feudalism, the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries and the landlord class of our own country,” as well as “the bourgeois reactionaries who collaborate with the imperialist and feudal forces.”¹⁶⁹ Taking power in 1949, the Chinese communists described their regime as a “new democracy” based on the four classes, a *stage* towards socialism.

So, while a basic dualism remained between those countries set for proletarian-socialist revolution and those for bourgeois-democratic changes, there was nonetheless a very important shift. The new, negative assessment of capitalist imperialism meant that Marxist support for capitalist modernization in these countries now entailed a firmly anti-imperialist program that included active participation in multi-class national liberation struggles. In colonial and “semi-colonial” countries, the key task was still bourgeois-democratic change, but this now took the form of what came to be called “national-democratic” revolution. Bourgeois-democratic revolution assumed a national-democratic form, and, involved multi-class movements that incorporated the bourgeoisie but excluded feudal forces. This allowed the Third International to have a major impact in the colonial and postcolonial world, replacing the weak Second International outlook for these territories with a militant agenda.

166 Comintern, “Theses on the National and Colonial Question Adopted by the Second Comintern Congress” [1920], in *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 1, ed. J. Degras (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), 141, 143–144.

167 Comintern, “Theses on the Eastern Question Adopted by the Fourth Comintern Congress” [1922], in *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 1, 389.

168 Comintern, “Extracts from ‘The Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries Adopted by the Sixth Comintern Congress’” [1928], in *The Communist International, 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 2, 534.

169 Z. Mao, “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party” [1939], in *Revolutionary Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. B. Turok (Johannesburg: Institute for African Alternatives, 1990), 77–79.

Secondly, there was a growing interest in Marxist circles in the idea that one class could carry out the “tasks” of another. Lenin argued that since the Russian bourgeoisie was unlikely to carry out a bourgeois-democratic revolution, the peasantry—which he considered a sort of petty bourgeoisie with anti-feudal interests—could play the a crucial role, albeit in alliance with the working class.¹⁷⁰ Trotsky’s theory of “permanent revolution” generalized this idea across late-developing countries, adding that the leading role of the working class (and its party, of course) in carrying out bourgeois-democratic “tasks” made it very likely that the revolution would proceed quickly to socialism.¹⁷¹

From the 1920s, Marxist communists increasingly argued that a rapid transition to a higher stage was feasible whenever the working class (represented, of course, by the party) became the leading force in national-democratic revolutions. Mao, for instance, argued that the Chinese revolution involved an alliance of peasants, petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie, and working class, but this, for historical reasons, had to be “led by the working class and the Communist Party.”¹⁷² The revolution was a fight against the imperialism and “feudal forces” that hampered capitalist development,¹⁷³ a “national revolution to overthrow imperialism” that would “regulate” rather than “destroy” capitalism.¹⁷⁴ But the fact that the revolution was “led by the working class and the Communist Party” obviously implied a situation very different from that of newly independent India, for example. Within ten years, the party announced a shift to “building socialism” and “socialist construction.”¹⁷⁵

The third and final point to note is that classical Marxism *did* admit the possibility of skipping stages altogether, usually through assistance from societies at higher stages. This possibility was first indicated by Marx. Although he viewed India as being at a pre-feudal stage,¹⁷⁶ he nonetheless believed that British colonialism was making India capitalist. For Russia, he suggested that traditional peasant communes could be a “starting point for communist

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Lenin, “Two Tactics of Social-Democracy.”

¹⁷¹ See, for example, L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1986).

¹⁷² Mao, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” 379.

¹⁷³ Z. Mao, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” [1927], in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, 28, 30.

¹⁷⁴ Mao, “On People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” 372, 379, 384.

¹⁷⁵ Z. Mao, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” [1957], in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, 433–434, 444–445.

¹⁷⁶ See, for example, K. Shiozawa, “Marx’s View of Asian Society and his ‘Asiatic Mode of Production,’” *The Developing Economies* 4, no. 3 (1966): 299–315.

development" if a Russian revolution became "the signal for a "proletarian revolution in the West" that could assist ("complement") it.¹⁷⁷ Trotsky's permanent revolution model did not replace his view that successful socialist transitions in less developed countries required revolutions in, and material aid from, those in advanced countries.

Another approach to skipping stages emerged in Russia where, against all Marxist theory, the first revolutionary Marxist state in history had emerged in a vast, backward, war-ruined, and semi-feudal society. When the revolution failed to spread to more advanced countries, the ruling Marxists, now in charge of much of Russia and its former colonies, decided to make up the historical shortfall by deliberately building "socialism in one country" through state-led industrialization.¹⁷⁸ This approach would later be embraced by other Marxist regimes, such as China. The Comintern argued explicitly that alliance with the Soviet Union and (hoped-for) Western revolutionary regimes could enable "colonial and semi-colonial countries" to "avoid the stage of capitalist domination, perhaps even the development of capitalist relations in general," moving "with the aid of the victorious proletarian dictatorship in other countries, into the proletarian socialist revolution."¹⁷⁹

In short, the strategies of the classical Marxist movement were deeply shaped by stage theory, and, despite the changes wrought by Lenin, a two-stage strategy for less-developed countries according to which bourgeois-/ national-democratic change comes first followed by socialism later. At the same time, there was room for flexibility in this model; the "Stalinists," far less mechanical than Trotskyists often claimed, proceeded quickly to the second (socialist) stage. In terms of practical politics, these ideas fostered alliances between Marxists and nationalists, allowed the Soviet Union (and later, regimes like China) to find allies among nationalists elsewhere, and, finally, facilitated the emergence of a number of Marxist revolutions from the womb of national liberation struggles, as in Vietnam and Mozambique.

Where, then, do the anarchists and syndicalists fit in? One crucial point of difference is that, as noted earlier, the anarchists rejected stages theory, and there is no equivalent in the anarchist literature of the classical Marxist debates over whether the immediate struggle was for bourgeois-democratic or

177 Marx and Engels, "Preface to the Second Russian Edition," 426.

178 S. Sherlock, "Berlin, Moscow and Bombay: The Marxism that India Inherited," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (1998): 63–76.

179 Comintern, "Extracts from 'The Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries,'" 533.

proletarian-socialist revolution, whether a Marxist party could substitute for bourgeoisie leadership in a national-democratic revolution and so on.

On the contrary, Bakunin stressed that the anarchists did not want a revolution that was “realizable only in the remote future” but rather the “completed and real emancipation of all workers, not only in some but in all nations, ‘developed’ and ‘undeveloped’” as an immediate aim.¹⁸⁰ In this model, the struggles against, for example, feudal relations or imperial rule are completely decoupled from the question of whether such battles enable a fuller development of capitalism and notions of historical stages toward socialism. Different struggles are not separated diachronically—that is, into a sequence that conforms to a model of historical stages, each with its own “tasks”—but take place simultaneously as a series of *concurrent* fronts of struggle by the revolutionary classes. Since historical schemas of progressive, sequential stages were “metaphysical fictions,”¹⁸¹ and since capitalism, specifically, was not a historically necessary stage and did not evolve along the trajectory that Marxists claimed, there was no justification for attempts to integrate concerns about stages and strategy.

What counted was not the supposed stage of history, but the preparation and power of the peasantry and working class in a given moment. When Marx said of Bakunin that “economic conditions do not matter to him,” adding that “will, not economic conditions, is the foundation of his social revolution,”¹⁸² he was not far off the mark. For Bakunin, what mattered was the *conscious* will of the revolutionary classes, informed by a “new social philosophy,” a “new faith” in the possibility of a new social order and in the ability of ordinary people to create it.¹⁸³ The “material conditions” and frustrated “needs” of the popular classes generated fundamental antagonisms toward capitalism, landlordism, and the state as well as a corresponding desire for “material well-being” and the ability to “live and work in an atmosphere of freedom.”¹⁸⁴ But this only promised the potential of radical change; in the very depths of “utmost poverty,” the masses often “fail to show signs of stirring.”¹⁸⁵

This was precisely why organs of counter-power and a revolutionary counter-culture were essential to making the anarchist revolution. Such a revolution was “infinitely more than a series of insurrections,” “more than mere street-fighting, and much more than a mere change of government.” It was, rather,

180 Bakunin, “Letter to *La Liberté*,” 284.

181 Kropotkin, “Modern Science and Anarchism,” 150–152.

182 Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms*, 69.

183 Bakunin, “The Program of the Alliance,” 249, 250–251.

184 Bakunin, “The Policy of the International,” 166–167.

185 Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,” 209; see also Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 335.

“a swift overthrow, in a few years, of institutions which have taken centuries to root into the soil” accompanied by “the birth of completely new ideas ... conceptions which soon become realities.”¹⁸⁶ It was, above all, the constructive activity of the popular classes, informed by a “new faith” that would change society.

As noted above, Kropotkin’s analysis of the French Revolution gave most of the credit for the abolition of serfdom and absolute monarchy to the peasants and workers rather than to the bourgeoisie, which he presented as a brake on progress. These deep changes in the social structure were made from below; the politicians only later “sanctioned by law” what the peasants and others “had demanded during the last four years, and had already achieved here and there.”¹⁸⁷ The French peasants and workers, however, were held back by the “want of clearness in the mind of the people as to what they should hope from the Revolution”; whereas the bourgeoisie had a clear program, the people were hesitant, prejudiced, focused on “simple negations,” and lacking a “constructive” project.¹⁸⁸ They won lasting changes but ultimately remained oppressed as class society survived; in due course, this failure gave rise to modern socialism, including anarchism.¹⁸⁹ For the anarchists, in other words, the key consideration as to whether a socialist revolution was possible was not whether history had reached the correct stage in the development of the forces and relations of production, but whether the capacity and consciousness of the peasantry and proletariat had reached a point where these classes could defeat the ruling class and remake society.

There was, then, no need for the capitalist stage to be completed, or even begun. Furthermore, the anarchists consistently argued that it was *after* the revolution that key advances in the forces of production would be undertaken and that the revolution would lead to a massive jump in output as a result of new, just social relations. By way of a historical example, Kropotkin cited evidence that rural productivity and production rose greatly during the French Revolution; the peasant “plough[ed] the lands that he had taken back from the lords, the convents, the churches,” “ate his fill, straightened his back and dared to speak out,” and applied his “skill and energy.”¹⁹⁰

While there is an odd parallel with Stalin’s and Mao’s idea that a revolutionary society could itself create the material conditions for progress rather than

186 Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973*, vol. 1, 22–23.

187 Ibid., 145, 165; see; also Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973*, vol. 2, 498–499.

188 Ibid., 33–34.

189 P. Kropotkin, “The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution” [1886], in *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 115–116.

190 Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973*, vol. 2, 594–595.

waiting until capitalism had matured, there are also essential differences. The anarchists envisaged a genuinely bottom-up process of innovation and growth based on cooperative relationships and democratic coordination, whilst Stalin and Mao relied on centralized state planning and coercion. Furthermore, anarchists and syndicalists never would have regarded the social relations of Stalinist Russia or Maoist China as in any sense egalitarian or socialist nor recognized such societies as a genuine transition away from capitalism.

The rejection of stages theory did not mean that Bakunin and Kropotkin considered issues of social and economic structure, specific political conditions, national and regional variations, or current developments irrelevant to revolutionary strategy. Bakunin's analyses elaborated strategy on the basis of "a detailed understanding of the relationship of forces between the bourgeoisie and the working class" at specific junctures in order to both disclose "suitable occasions" for revolution and to "avoid making tragic mistakes."¹⁹¹ A notable example in this regard is his 1870 "Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis," written on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War, which elaborates a strategy of turning national conflict into social revolution that anticipated the 1871 Paris Commune in a truly astounding manner.¹⁹² Another is his 1873 text *Statism and Anarchy*, which provides a detailed survey of revolutionary prospects in different parts of Europe.¹⁹³ Kropotkin's political interventions, too, were deeply shaped by careful analyses of contemporary realities. In the 1870s he stressed the model of the 1871 Paris Commune, "a new page in history";¹⁹⁴ a decade later, however, observing the rise of labor in France, he advocating working within the unions, taking care to understand the situation in "each locality."¹⁹⁵ (There are, of course, many anarchists who have been less careful, relying on abstract theory,¹⁹⁶ but this is not a unique or intrinsic anarchist failing, as the history of many Marxist groups attests).

Bakunin was also well aware of the fact that peasants were harder to organize than urban workers, and often more conservative, even "egoistic and reactionary," full of "prejudices" against revolution, and fiercely attached to private property.¹⁹⁷ But he rejected notions that peasants had to be led or organized by

191 R. Berthier, "Putting the Record Straight on Mikhail Bakunin," trans. Nick Heath, *Libertarian Communist Review* 2 (1976): n.p.

192 Bakunin, "Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis."

193 M. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* [1873], ed. M. Statz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 1.

194 Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism," 51–52.

195 Kropotkin, "Workers' Organization," 307–308.

196 Berthier, "Putting the Record Straight on Mikhail Bakunin."

197 Bakunin, "Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis," 189, 192.

other classes or by a revolutionary party or abolished through proletarianization, as under Marxist regimes. Rather, peasants had to be drawn into the revolutionary movement by applying the “determined treatment of revolutionary socialism” to the “rash of measles” of reactionary sentiment.¹⁹⁸ This required careful political work that paid close attention to peasant attitudes, grievances, and traditions.

Whereas Marx believed that the Russian peasant communes could be a “starting point for communist development” only if aided by “proletarian revolution in the West,”¹⁹⁹ this stages framework was absent in Bakunin’s thought. The same is true of Lenin’s and Mao’s insistence on working class (more precisely, Marxist party) leadership of the peasants. Bakunin did not view the obstacles to the peasant commune playing a revolutionary role in terms of the level of the forces of production or the supposed flaws of pre-proletarian exploited classes. Rather, these obstacles lay at the level of consciousness: the peasant villages had to overcome their “shameful patriarchal regime,” stifling lack of individual freedom, commitment to the “cult of the Tsar,” social and cultural isolation, and subjugation to landlords.²⁰⁰ This required the “most enlightened peasants,” infused with anarchist ideas, to lead the challenge against the old ways, coordinate the villages, and unite the peasants with the workers—possibly assisted by radical intellectuals from the outside who “share their life, their poverty, their cause, and their desperate revolt.” Kropotkin’s position on this issue was very similar.²⁰¹

Since the stages framework was absent from anarchism, the movement developed a large and impressive base within the colonial and postcolonial world from its emergence in the 1860s and 1870s. Indeed, much of the history of anarchism and syndicalism “took place in the ‘East’ and the ‘South,’ not in the ‘North’ and the ‘West.’”²⁰² The anarchists were always critical of imperialism and opposed national and racial oppression on principle. National freedom followed from the anarchist opposition to hierarchy and its emphasis on voluntary cooperation and self-management. The right of freely uniting and separating,” Bakunin wrote, “is the first and most important of all political rights.”²⁰³

198 Bakunin, “Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,” 189–192, 197, 208–209.

199 Marx and Engels, “Preface to the Second Russian Edition,” 426.

200 See Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” 346–350.

201 P. Kropotkin, “Must We Occupy Ourselves With an Examination of the Ideal of a Future Society?” [1873], in *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution: P.A. Kropotkin*, ed. M.A. Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1970), 88–98, 100–101.

202 van der Walt and Hirsch, “Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism,” xl.

203 Quoted in Eltzbacher, *Anarchism*, 81.

There were important debates amongst anarchists and syndicalists over the correct approach to anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles, but key issues that concerned the classical Marxists—such as whether imperialism played a historically progressive or reactionary role, or whether bourgeois-/national-democratic revolutions were necessary in the colonial world, did not feature in them. Rather, these debates centered on whether—and if so, how—anti-imperialist and national struggles linked to the anarchist revolution. In other words, they concerned the place of such struggles in the overall strategy for revolutionary change rather than their role in a larger historical schema structured around successive stages. There were three main positions in this regard,²⁰⁴ each of which asserted a fundamental opposition to imperialism but varied in its attitude toward nationalism and its assessment of the tasks of the libertarians in relation to national liberation struggles.

The first of these anarchist and syndicalist approaches held that national liberation struggles were fundamentally futile inasmuch as they were bound to simply replace foreign with local oppressors. Because such struggles would involve multi-class movements, they would easily be local elites who would constitute new, independent states. National liberation movements were too narrow; whether the new national ruling class could, or would, advance the forces of production was irrelevant. The second approach, by contrast, actively and uncritically embraced nationalism on the grounds that an independent state, for all its limitations, was a step forward—a valuable reform worthy of support.

Both of these approaches essentially identified national liberation movements with *nationalism*, which is an ideology that seeks to unite all members of a given nation to establish a state that can express the national will. The difference is that one views nationalism as an obstacle to the anarchist revolution and so, essentially absents itself from national liberation movements, while the other views nationalism as a relatively progressive force, and so, essentially gives nationalism uncritical support, deferring the anarchist revolution to later. There is an odd parallel here to the two-stage approach to struggle in the colonial and postcolonial world found in the Marxist tradition, although the anarchists' two-stage approach had little to do with notions of the necessity of a bourgeois-democratic or national-democratic revolution. Rather, it seems to have arisen from a pessimistic assessment of the prospects for anarchist

204 van der Walt and Hirsch, "Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism," lv-lxvii. See also L. van der Walt, "Pour Une Histoire de L'anti-impérialisme Anarchiste: 'Dans Cette Lutte, Seuls Les Ouvriers et Les Paysans Ironont Jusqu'au Bout,'" *Refractions* 8 (2002): 27–37.

revolution, which was deferred to a vague future,²⁰⁵ or in situations where national survival and unity seemingly overrode other differences.

The third anarchist and syndicalist position on national liberation struggles argued, on the contrary, that nationalism was only *one* current in anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles and suggested that anarchists could shape these struggles by pushing them in the direction of an internationalist and anti-statist social revolution. That is, while the anarchists could work alongside nationalists and others in these struggles, they would contest them, seeking ideological hegemony and a radical decolonization that would secure the demands of the popular classes for social and economic as well as national freedom through an anarchist society.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out to provide a more systematic analysis of the differences and similarities between Marxism and anarchism by unpacking their strategic and analytical similarities and differences. It has sought to move beyond caricature and non-debate as well as the traditional reduction of issues to the Marx-Bakunin conflict. This has required a discussion of the larger classical Marxist tradition, including in the years after Marx, as well as closer attention to anarchists other than Bakunin (most notably Kropotkin) and to issues often absent from the literature, such as the differences and similarities between the traditions' analyses of, for example, bourgeois revolutions and their approaches to anti-colonial struggles. Although differences in strategy have been an important part of this discussion, I have sought to show how these are deeply embedded in different conceptions of economy, society, and history and to outline the essential elements of these differences.

It is not only important to move beyond the "non-debate between Marxist and anarchist tendencies on the revolutionary left,"²⁰⁶ but also to recognize that it is precisely because the two *differ* significantly that such a debate is possible and valuable. This is also why recent calls for a synthesis of anarchism and Marxism run aground. The notion that a synthesis is possible because the differences are very limited is shown to be false when examined dispassionately. Excesses, errors, and crude polarizations have marred many anarchist-Marxist exchanges, but these exchanges reflect the existence of the division;

205 See, for example, A. Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), chapter 11.

206 Blackledge, "Anarchism, Syndicalism and Strategy."

they are not its cause. The related notion that a synthesis is necessary because the two sides complement one another—anarchism being strong on ethics and vision, Marxism being strong on theory—is also false. Anarchism has a substantial, and rich body of theory, some of which overlaps with Marxism,²⁰⁷ so arguments that justify synthesis on the grounds that anarchism lacks adequate theory are spurious²⁰⁸ and reproduce the unfair charge—often made by Marxists—that anarchism lacks analytical rigor.

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²⁰⁷ Berthier, *Social-Democracy and Anarchism*, 162–163.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, M. Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (London: Verso, 2014), 160–161, 164.

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