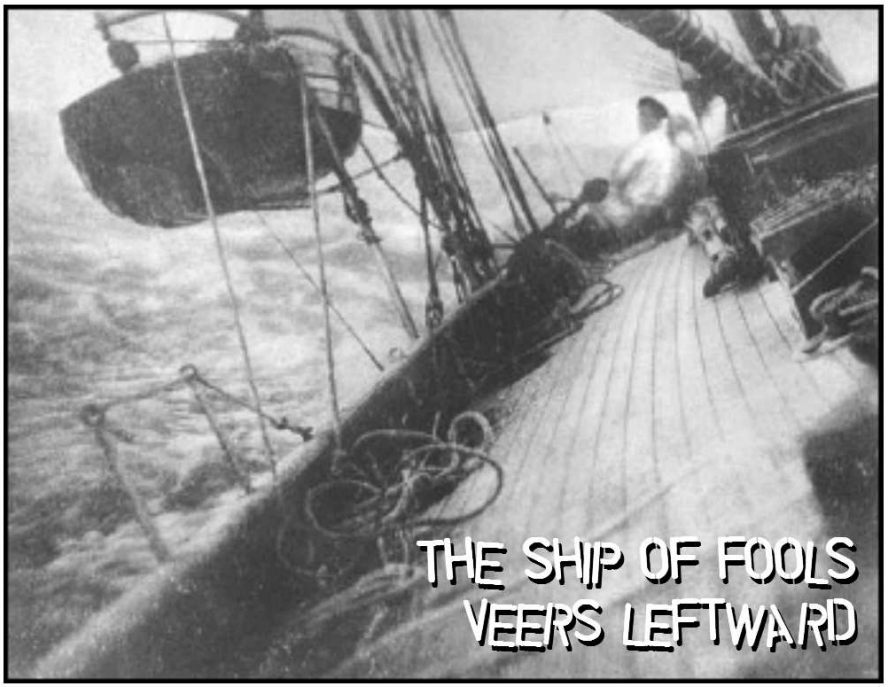
LEFTISM 101

by Lawrence Jarach



INTRO

This pamphlet collects two excellent essays by Lawrence Jarach: “Leftism 101” from *Back to Basics: The Problem of the Left* put out by the Green Anarchy collective and “Anarchists, Don't let the Left(overs) Ruin your Appetite” from *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* #48.

We feel they are worth reprinting because they offer a substantive critique of “the Left” in terms of its philosophy and its history. We’re skeptical of anarchists associating with the Leftist tradition because it tends to lead anarchists in very “un-anarchist” directions whether that be participating in “movements” seeking reforms or concessions from the state or suspending their goals and principles in the interest of short-term “coalitions.”

The first essay looks at the origins of Leftist thought and anarchism’s relationship to it. The second essay provides a brief overview of anarchists’ historical relationship with “the Left,” concluding that there is no point in engaging with it.

LEFTISM 101

What is Leftism?

For most it means some form of socialism, despite the fact that there are plenty of leftists who are not opposed to capitalism (clearly from the actual history of socialism, not all socialists are opposed to capitalism either). Plenty of other arguments can be made about that, but let's just keep things simple and assume that the two terms are synonymous. As is the case with most vague terms, however, it's easier to come up with a list of characteristics than a definition. Leftism encompasses many divergent ideas, strategies, and tactics; are there any common threads that unite all leftists, despite some obvious differences? In order to begin an attempt at an answer, it is necessary to examine the philosophical antecedents to what can broadly be termed Socialism.

Liberalism, Humanism, and Republicanism are political and philosophical schools of thought deriving from the modern European tradition (roughly beginning during the Renaissance). Without going into details, adherents of the three (especially Liberalism) presume the existence of an ideal property-owning male individual who is a fully rational (or at least a potentially rational) agent. This idealized individual stands opposed to the arbitrary authority of the economic and political systems of monarchism and feudalism, as well as the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church. All three (LH&R) presume the capacity of anyone (male), through education and hard work, to succeed in a free market (of commodities and ideas). Competition is the overall ethos of all three.

The promoters of LH&R insist that these modernist philosophies-compared to monarchism, elitism, and feudalism-are advances on the road to human freedom. They believe it more beneficial for what they call The Greater Good to adhere to and promote a philosophy that

at least proposes the ability of anyone to gain some kind of control over her/his own life, whether in the realm of education, economic prosperity, or political interactions. The ultimate goals of LH&R are to do away with economic scarcity and intellectual/spiritual poverty, while promoting the idea of more democratic governance. They promote this under the rubric of Justice, and they see the State as its ultimate guarantor.

Socialism as a modern movement has been greatly influenced by these three philosophies. Like those who adhere to LH&R, leftists are concerned with, and are opposed to, economic and social injustice. They all propose ameliorating social ills through active intervention or charity, whether under the auspices of the State, NGOs, or other formal organizations. Very few of the proposed solutions or stopgaps promote (or even acknowledge) self-organized solutions engaged in by those directly suffering such ills. Welfare, affirmative action programs, psychiatric hospitals, drug rehabilitation facilities, etc. are all examples of various attempts to deal with social problems. Given the premises of these overlapping philosophies and their practical frameworks, they have the appearance of being the results of intelligence and knowledge mixed with empathy and the desire to help people. Cooperation for The Common Good is seen as more beneficial to humanity than individual competition. However, socialism also takes the existence of competition for granted. Liberals and socialists alike believe that human beings do not naturally get along, so we must be educated and encouraged to be cooperative. When all else fails, this can always be enforced by the State.

Moderate, Radical, and Extreme Leftism

Tactics and strategies

Regardless of the fact that there is plenty of overlap and blending-precluding real, discrete boundaries-I hope that describing these various manifestations of leftism will be a way to identify certain particular characteristics.

In terms of strategy and tactics, moderate leftists believe that things can be made better by working within current structures and institutions. Clearly reformist, moderate leftists promote legal, peaceful, and polite superficial alterations in the status quo, eventually hoping to legislate socialism into existence. The democracy they champion is bourgeois: one person, one vote, majority rule.

Radical leftists promotes a mixture of legal and illegal tactics, depending on whatever appears to have a better chance of succeeding at the moment, but they ultimately want the sanction of some properly constituted legal institutions (especially when they get to make most of the rules to be enforced). They are pragmatic, hoping for peaceful change, but ready to fight if they believe it to be necessary. The democracy they promote is more proletarian: they aren't worried about the process of any particular election, so long as gains are made at the expense of the bosses and mainstream politicians.

Extreme leftists are amoral pragmatists, a strategic orientation that can also be termed opportunistic. They are decidedly impolite, explicitly desiring the destruction of current institutions (often including the State), with the desire to remake them so that only they themselves will be able to make and enforce new laws. They are much more willing to use force in the service of their goals. The democracy they promote is usually based on a Party.

Relationship to capitalists

All leftists privilege the category of worker as worker/producer, an entity that exists only within the sphere of the economy. Moderate leftists campaign for workers' rights (to strike, to have job security and safety, to have decent and fair contracts), trying to mitigate the more obvious abuses of the bosses through the passage and enforcement of progressive legislation. They want capitalism to be organized with "People Before Profits" (as the overused slogan has it), ignoring the internal logic and history of capitalism. Moderate leftists promote socially responsible investing and want a more just distribution of wealth; social wealth in the form of the much-touted "safety net," and personal wealth in the form of higher wages and increased taxes on corporations and the rich. They want to balance the rights of property and labor.

Radical leftists favor workers at the expense of the bosses. Workers are always right to the radical leftist. They wish to change the legal structure in such a way to reflect this favoritism, which is supposed to compensate for the previous history of exploitation. The redistribution of wealth envisioned by radical leftists builds on the higher wages and increased taxation of the corporations and the rich to include selective expropriation/ nationalization (with or without compensation) of various resources (banks, natural resources for example).

Extreme leftists promote the total expropriation — without compensation — of the capitalist class, not only to right the wrongs of economic exploitation, but to remove the capitalist class from political power as well. At some point, the workers are to be at least nominally in charge of economic and political decision making (although that is usually meditated through a Party leadership).

The role of the State

Leftists view the State on a continuum of ambivalence. Most are clear that the role of the State is to further the goals of whatever class happens to rule at any given period; further they all recognize that the ruling class always reserves for itself a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and violence to enforce their rule. In the political imaginations of all moderate and some radical leftists, the State (even with a completely capitalist ruling class) can be used to remedy many social problems, from the excesses of transnational corporations to the abuses of those who have been traditionally disenfranchised (immigrants, women, minorities, the homeless, etc.). For extreme leftists, only their own State can solve such problems, because it is in the interest of the current ruling class to maintain divisions among those who are not of the ruling class. Despite the ambivalence, an attachment to the functions of government as executed by the State remains. This is the pivotal area of conflict between all leftists and all anarchists, despite the historical positioning of anarchism within the spectrum of leftism — about which more below.

The role of the individual

Missing from all these different strains of leftism is a discussion of the individual. While LH&R refer briefly to the individual, these philosophies do not take into account non-property-owning males, females, or juveniles — who are indeed considered the property of the normative individual: the adult property-owning man. This led to the complete lack on interest in (and the accompanying exploitation of) peasants and workers, a disregard that is

supposed to be corrected by socialism. Unfortunately, virtually all socialists only posit the category Worker and Peasant as collective classes — a mass to be molded and directed — never considering the desires or interests of the individual (male or female) worker or peasant to control their own lives. According to the ideological imperatives of leftist thought, the self-activity of these masses is seen suspiciously through the ideological blinkers of the competitive ethos of capitalism (since the masses aren't yet intelligent enough to be socialists); the workers will perhaps be able to organize themselves into defensive trade unions in order to safeguard their wages, while the peasants will only want to own and work their own piece of land. Again, education and enforcement of cooperation is necessary for these masses to become conscious political radicals.

A Generic Leftism?

So all leftists share the goals of making up for injustice by decree, whether the decree comes out of better/more responsive representatives and leaders, a more democratic political process, or the elimination of a non-worker power base. They all desire to organize, mobilize, and direct masses of people, with the eventual goal of attaining a more or less coherent majority, in order to propel progressive and democratic change of social institutions. Recruitment, education, and inculcating leftist values are some of the more mundane strategies leftists use to increase their influence in the wider political landscape.

All leftists have a common distrust of regular (non-political/non-politicized) people being able to decide for themselves how to solve the problems that face them. All leftists share an abiding faith in leadership. Not just a trust of particular leaders who portray themselves as having certain moral or ethical virtues over and above common people, but of the very principle of leadership. This confidence in leadership never brings representational politics into question. The existence of elected or appointed leaders who speak and act on behalf, or in the place, of individuals and groups is a given; mediation in the realm of politics is taken as a necessity, removing most decision making from individuals and groups. Leftists share this commitment to leadership and representation — they believe themselves able to justly represent those who have traditionally been excluded from politics: the disenfranchised, the voiceless, the weak.

The leftist activist, as a representative of those who suffer, is a person who believes her/himself to be indispensable to improving the lives of others. This derives from a dual-pronged notion common to all leftists:

1.Non-political people, left to their own devices, will never be able to alter their situations in a radical or revolutionary manner (Lenin's dismissal of workers as never being able to move beyond a “trade union mentality” without some professional outside help comes to mind here); and

2. Those with more intelligence or a better analysis are both wise and ethical enough to lead (whether through example or by decree) and organize others for their own good, and perhaps more importantly, the greater good.

The unspoken but implicit theme that runs through this brief assessment of leftism is a reliance on authoritarian relations, whether assumed or enforced, brutally compelling or gently rational. The existence of an economy (exchange of commodities in a market) presumes the existence of one or more institutions to mediate disputes between those who produce, those who own, and those who consume; the existence of a representational

political process presumes the existence of one or more institutions to mediate disputes between diverse parties based on common interest (often with conflicting goals); the existence of leadership presumes that there are substantive differences in the emotional and intellectual capacities of those who direct and those who follow. There are plenty of rationalizations contributing to the maintenance of such institutions of social control (schools, prisons, the military, the workplace), from efficiency to expediency, but they all ultimately rely on the legitimate (sanctioned by the State) use of coercive authority to enforce decisions. Leftists share a faith in the mediating influence of wise and ethical leaders who can work within politically neutral, socially progressive, and humane institutional frameworks. Their thoroughly hierarchical and authoritarian natures, however, should be clear even after a cursory glance.

Are All Forms of Anarchism Leftist?

All anarchists share a desire to abolish government; that is the definition of anarchism. Starting with Bakunin, anarchism has been explicitly anti-statist, anti-capitalist, and anti-authoritarian; no serious anarchist seeks to alter that. Leftists have consistently supported and promoted the functions of the State, have an ambiguous relationship to capitalist development, and are all interested in maintaining hierarchical relationships. In addition, historically they have either tacitly ignored or actively suppressed the desires of individuals and groups for autonomy and self-organization, further eroding any credible solidarity between themselves and anarchists. On a purely definitional level, then, there should be an automatic distinction between leftists and anarchists, regardless of how things have appeared in history.

Despite these differences, many anarchists have thought of themselves as extreme leftists — and continue to do so — because they share many of the same analyses and interests (a distaste for capitalism, the necessity of revolution, for example) as leftists; many revolutionary leftists have also considered anarchists to be their (naïve) comrades — except in moments when the leftists gain some power; then the anarchists are either co-opted, jailed, or executed. The possibility for an extreme leftist to be anti-statist may be high, but is certainly not guaranteed, as any analysis history will show.

Left anarchists retain some kind of allegiance to 19th century LH&R and socialist philosophers, preferring the broad, generalized (and therefore extremely vague) category of socialism/anti-capitalism and the strategy of mass political struggles based on coalitions with other leftists, all the while showing little (if any) interest in promoting individual and group autonomy. From these premises, they can quite easily fall prey to the centralizing tendencies and leadership functions that dominate the tactics of leftists. They are quick to quote Bakunin (maybe Kropotkin too) and advocate organizational forms that might have been appropriate in the era of the First International, apparently oblivious to the sweeping changes that have occurred in the world in the past hundred-plus years — and they then have the gall to ridicule Marxists for remaining wedded to Marx's outdated theories, as if by not naming their own tendencies after other dead guys they are thereby immune from similar mistakes.

The drawbacks and problems with Marxism, however — for example that it promotes the idea of a linear progression of history of order developing out of chaos, freedom developing out of oppression, material abundance developing out of scarcity, socialism developing out of capitalism, plus an absolute faith in Science as the ideologically neutral pursuit of pure

Knowledge, and a similar faith in the liberatory function of all technology — are the same drawbacks and problems with the anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin. All of this seems lost on left anarchists. They blithely continue to promote a century-old version of anarchism, clearly unaware of, or unconcerned by, the fact that the philosophical and practical failures of leftism — in terms of the individual, the natural world, and appropriate modes of resistance to the continued domination of a flexible, adaptable, and expanding capitalism — are shared by this archaic form of anarchism as well.

Those of us who are interested in promoting radical social change in general, and anarchy in particular, need to emulate and improve upon successful (however temporary) revolutionary projects for liberation, rather than congratulating ourselves for being the heirs of Bakunin (et al.). We can do this best if we free ourselves from the historical baggage and the ideological and strategic constraints of all varieties of leftism.

Anarchists, Don't let the Left(overs) Ruin your Appetite...

Introduction

An uneasy relationship has existed between anarchists and leftists from the time Proudhon positively proclaimed him self an anarchist 150 years ago. From the 1860s through the 1930s most anarchists considered themselves to be an integral part of the international labor movement, even if there were moments of extreme conflict within it; leftist anarchists saw themselves as the radical conscience of the Left — the left of the Left, as it were. But since the death of 19th century anarchism on the barricades of Barcelona in May 1937, anarchists haven't had a movement to call their own. As a result, many anarchists trail after leftist projects, seemingly oblivious to the sometimes fatal historical rivalry that has existed between the two tendencies. They get seduced either by the seemingly antiauthoritarian characteristics of such groups (like decentralization), or by the use of some anarchic vocabulary (direct action for example).

The most notable recent example is the widespread uncritical anarchist support for and solidarity with the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army). The name of the organization should be enough to cause anarchists to pause: national liberation has never been part of the anarchist agenda. The use of the Mexican flag at EZLN conventions makes it clear that the EZLN is a Mexican-identified movement, not an international one. Their calls for fair elections within the context of Mexican history is quite radical, but it remains a statist demand, and as such cannot be anarchist by any stretch of the imagination. The

EZLN, for all its revolutionary posturing, is a broad-based democratic movement for progressive social change within the fabric of the Mexican state; it is leftist, liberal, social democratic, postmodern, courageous in the face of overwhelming odds and official repression... you name it, but it is not anarchist. The zapatistas don't refuse solidarity from anarchists, but to extrapolate from this fact that they themselves are anarchists — or even antiauthoritarians — is wishful thinking at best. Characteristics are not the same thing as definitions.

Anarchists and the International Labor Movement, Part I

The initial place where the rivalry between leftists and anarchists occurred was the First International (1864-76). Besides the well-known personal animosity between Marx and Bakunin, conflicts arose between the libertarian socialists and the authoritarian socialists over the ostensible goal of the International: how best to work for the emancipation of the working class. Using parliamentary procedures (voting for representatives) within a framework that accepted the existence of the state was the main tactic supported by the authoritarians. In the non-electoral arena, but remaining firmly within a statist agenda, was the demand of the right of workers to form legal trade unions. In contrast, direct action (any activity that takes place without the permission, aid, or support of politicians or other elected officials) was promoted by the libertarians. Strikes and workplace occupations are the best examples of this method. The leftists preferred persuasion and the petitioning of the ruling class while the anarchists, recognizing the futility of this approach, preferred to take matters into their own hands: peacefully if possible, more insistently if necessary.

Another rift had to do with the issue of nationalism, which was a reflection of the tension between centralization and decentralization. For a majority of Internationalists, nationalism was seen as a progressive force because it led to the consolidation and further industrialization of natural resources and the means of production. This in turn created a larger proletariat, and a larger proletariat meant a better chance of successful revolution. Most anarchists correctly saw nationalism as a force opposed to federalism, a basic organizing method of libertarians. These and other irreconcilable conflicts between the two tendencies (such as the place of the individual in the class struggle) led to the decline of the International. This dissolution began in the wake of the Paris Commune in 1871; by the time Marx was able to relocate the General Council to New York in 1872 (far from the libertarian influence of the Spanish, French, and Italian sections), Bakunin and other leading anarchist activists had already been expelled from the organization. Individual anarchists were welcome to remain in the International, provided they dispensed with their antiauthoritarian principles. The First International became an anarchist-free zone for the last four years of its existence.

The social democrats (marxist or non-marxist, but always anti-revolutionary) who began the work of creating the Second International (1889-1914), already agreed (by the mere fact that most were members of legal socialist parties) that its methods were to be peaceful and lawful. They promoted universal male suffrage, with the program of getting their members elected to legislative bodies in order to enact pro-union laws, eventually legislating socialism into existence. Despite the total absence of any discussion of direct action, federalism, or revolution there were some anarchists (mostly syndicalists yearning for a big organization to join) who wanted to participate. They were rebuffed; the Second International was anarchist-free from the beginning.

Interlude: Anarchists in the Mexican and Russian Revolutions

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910, primarily as a middle-class rebellion against the corrupt and ultra-conservative *porfiriato* (the years of the rule of Profirio Diaz). Anarchists were involved in the agitation to get rid of Diaz, most notably members of the PLM (Mexican Liberal Party), whose main theoretician was Ricardo Flores Magon. The PLM remained active throughout the revolutionary period. They tried to gain allies and supporters for radical land redistribution programs among the peasant armies of Villa and Zapata, and to a large degree were successful.

Another arena of anarchist agitation was the Casa Del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker) in Mexico City. The Casa was the place where anarcho-syndicalists, revolutionary unionists, and socialists congregated. Their focus was on legalizing unions and other aspects of industrial relations rather than on the agrarian question, even though the majority of Mexico's poor and working people were landless peasants. A majority of those involved in the Casa were adherents of a philosophical tendency that defined its members by the term *cientificos* (more or less "scientists"): rational, urban, civilized. As such, they were appalled by the use of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the banners of the original zapatistas. In addition, their constant collaborations with authoritarian socialists seems to have weakened their adherence to libertarian principles; so much so that they became partners in the Red Battalions, which were organized by the center-left Constitutionalists to fight against the Zapatistas. This was the first (but unfortunately not the last) seriously embarrassing and shameful episode of anarchist history, when authoritarians took advantage of the gullibility of anarchists for their own benefit.

Rather than uniting with the radical peasants in the countryside around a truly revolutionary program of total expropriation of landed estates and industries (in keeping with their pronouncements), the syndicalists of the Casa preferred to make common cause with their anti-radical legalistic leftist rivals to kill and be killed by peasant revolutionaries. Later, as the result of a general strike in 1916, the Casa and all unions were outlawed, their more radical leaders were assassinated or imprisoned, and almost all urban revolutionary activity ceased. The new Constitutionalist rulers understood that anarcho-syndicalists, the erstwhile allies of progressive leftists, could not be mollified as easily with promises of legal status as the authoritarian socialists, and the leftists didn't seem to mind too much that their libertarian rivals were out of the picture.

The overthrow of the czarist regime in Russia in February 1917 was the defining moment of 20th century leftism. Suddenly political parties were decriminalized, political prisoners were amnestied, the death penalty was abolished. Revolutionary activity mushroomed, dominated by the Social Revolutionaries (SRs) in the countryside, the Bolsheviks (the left wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party) in the cities and the armed forces, and anarchists all over (their influence far out of proportion to their actual numbers). In the early months of the Russian Revolution, the SRs and the anarchists supported the slogan: "The land to the peasants; the factories to the workers"; the Bolsheviks were hesitant about the slogan as a program since they were the heirs of the more cautious notion that the masses still needed to be led by technocrats and other smart people like themselves. But as the momentum and enthusiasm of revolutionary self-activity continued (in the form of councils — *soviet* in Russian — and factory committees), Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership adopted the slogan as well. Another slogan soon appeared: "All power to the soviets."

Each of the slogans was interpreted differently by the different revolutionary tendencies. For anarchists and left SRs (the right SRs had previously split away from the revolutionary aspects of the SR program in favor of strictly parliamentary activity) the slogan “The land to the peasants; the factories to the workers” meant just that: the peasants and workers would have total control over what was produced, how it would be produced, and how, when, and where it would be distributed. Federalism was the preferred method of organizing such a situation. For the Bolsheviks, however, such independent and decentralized self-activity was unthinkable; the State should decide how and when and where commodities were to be produced and distributed. Centralized planning was promoted as the only efficient and just way to control production and distribution. After the Bolshevik seizure of state power in October 1917, the approved revolutionary slogan became “All power to the soviets,” and that bothersome business about the land and the peasants and the factories and the workers was phased out.

Similarly there were unique interpretations of “All power to the soviets,” depending on party affiliation. To the Bolsheviks this was a call for a government of representatives from the soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers with the addition of party members who, together, would implement and guide the dictatorship of the proletariat. To the left SRs and the anarchists, the slogan meant a federation of soviets and factory committees with or without delegates; for the anarchists this also meant no state at all.

The differences of interpretation turned into armed confrontations within six months of Bolshevik rule. The soviets began to be turned into organs that merely ratified Bolshevik executive decisions, while the more independent factory committees were abolished. Anarchists and left SRs who pointed out this anti-revolutionary tactic were arrested by the Cheka and were imprisoned — and sometimes executed — with counter-revolutionaries. In April 1918, the Cheka and regular police forces carried out simultaneous raids on anarchist centers in Petrograd and Moscow; the anarchists returned fire but eventually surrendered. The surviving arrested anarchists were deported the following year.

Meanwhile in the Ukraine from 1918-21, the Makhnovist Insurgent Army was creating liberated zones for workers and peasants by encouraging and facilitating the expropriation of landed estates and factories while carrying out a total war against the Whites (monarchist counter-revolutionaries), Ukrainian nationalists (republicans and socialists), and, on occasion, Trotsky's Red Army. Twice there were formal treaties made between the Red Army and the Insurgent Army, and twice the Bolsheviks broke their agreements when it suited their military and state policy, arresting — but most often executing — the insurgent anarchists. For the Russian anarchists who supported the Makhnovists (there were many who didn't, believing that a military structure was incompatible with true anarchist goals), this was the definitive end of their honeymoon with the Bolsheviks.

In the spring of 1921, the Bolsheviks faced the most serious threat to their retention of state power and their pretense of being the party of the proletariat. There was a rebellion at the island naval fortress of Kronstadt, just off the coast from Petrograd. The sailors, soldiers, and workers, frustrated with the intensely destructive policies of War Communism as well as the heavy-handed response of the Bolsheviks to a strike of factory workers in Petrograd, began a protest movement against government injustice. Their demands included an end to forced grain requisitions in the countryside, abolition of the death penalty, freedom of speech and press for all socialist groups (including anarchists), and open (that is, not dominated by the Communist Party) elections in the soviets. Hardly any anarchists were involved in the rebellion (most had already been arrested or killed, and Kronstadt was a

Bolshevik stronghold), but the complaints and demands of the Kronstadters fell in line with the anarchist critiques of the Soviet regime.

Lenin and Trotsky issued many misleading denunciations of the rebels, often resorting to outright fabrications in their characterizations of its leaders. They were afraid of the appeal (coming, as it did, from a bastion of approved revolutionary activity) such a call for a decentralized, directly democratic program would have on a population weary of War Communism (since the civil war had been officially over for several months) yet still committed to the revolutionary slogans of "All power to the soviets," and "The land to the peasants; the factories to the workers." The Bolsheviks, preferring the methods of statecraft over revolutionary solidarity and compromise, attacked the island and massacred the rebels who survived the military suppression. Even for the anarchists who were willing to excuse the excesses of authoritarianism in the Bolshevik government, this was too much. Many left Russia voluntarily at around the same time that the dissident anarchists were deported, ridding the Communist Party of its most radical opponents. The Soviet Union was subsequently unencumbered by the influence of anarchists.

Anarchists in the International Labor Movement, Part II

In the aftermath of the consolidation of Bolshevik rule in Russia, the Third — or Communist — International was formed in 1919. Non-Russian anarchists, excited about the real possibility of revolution spreading around the world in the wake of the Russian Revolution, initially tended to overlook the centralized and authoritarian nature of the organization (much as their Russian counterparts had overlooked the same aspects of the Bolshevik state for the early years of its existence). At the time of the first conference of the Comintern, the majority of Russian anarchists were either dead or in prison (despite Lenin's assurances that there were no real anarchists in his jails — only criminals). Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and anarcho-syndicalists from around the world who were attending lobbied the Soviet government to release these so-called criminals from jail; the Russians were quietly released and expelled. Members of the American IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and the Spanish CNT (National Confederation of Labor) declined to affiliate to the Comintern.

Lenin's "Left-Wing Communism — An Infantile Disorder" was published in 1921, the same year of the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising, the final destruction of the Makhnovist Insurgent Army and the libertarian communes of the Ukraine, and the adoption of the neo-capitalist New Economic Policy. This screed was aimed primarily at council communists and other independent revolutionary socialists, but charges of "anarcho-syndicalist deviationism" were thrown at all of Lenin's opponents. All those not uncritically supportive of the policies of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its methodology of democratic centralism were declared to be objectively counter-revolutionary. The attempt to keep the international labor movement subservient to the orders of the headquarters in Moscow, of which Lenin's tract was the most public aspect, was nearly totally successful. The strategy of socialism in one country was promulgated and with centralized hierarchical discipline in place, the Comintern could be used to further Soviet foreign policy goals.

Spain

The revolutionary response to the attempted military coup in Spain in July 1936

resulted in a protracted civil war between the defenders of the old monarchist order and the upholders of the five year old parliamentary democracy. Members of the large anarcho-syndicalist CNT were put in an awkward position: supporting one form of government over another. Some chose to pursue revolutionary goals rather than become government anarchists, but the majority went for collaboration with the forces of legalism — some even entering the government by becoming Cabinet Ministers.

By that time the Comintern had adopted the anti-revolutionary policy of the Popular Front, promoting parliamentary democracy in opposition to fascism through an alliance of republicans, middle-class progressives, social democrats, and Communists. This final abandonment of class struggle led directly to the May '37 Communist-dominated Popular Front's armed suppression of the CNT and the anti-stalinist POUM (Worker's Party of Marxist Unification), the two mass organizations in Spain at least nominally committed to some sort of revolution. The international labor movement was in the control of stalinists for the next decade.

The Left

The Left has consistently been identified with the international labor movement from the time of the First International; with the shift of focus from western Europe toward Russia beginning in 1917 and continuing into the 1960s, leftists have identified themselves in relation to events that occurred in the workers' paradise. Whether a leninist, trotskyist, stalinist, or non-leninist communist, each variety of leftist has a particular view of when things went wrong (or not) with the Russian revolutionary experiment.

For anarchists who considered themselves part of the Left even after the debacles of the Internationals, this method of self-identification created a crisis: whether to make accommodations to the politics of leninism or to dispense with any and all hints of vanguardism. Most opted for the latter, but some (including the former Makhnovist Arshinov and Makhno himself) favored the militaristic vanguardism of the "Anarchist Platform." Their more principled anarchist opponents called the Platformists "anarcho-bolsheviks," for whom it was merely a case of the unchecked authoritarian behavior of the Bolsheviks that led them to abandon the true revolution; the necessary existence, goals, and methods of a self-conscious militarized revolutionary vanguard were accepted in full. Such an analysis dispensed with the idea of a mass-based self-organized revolution and substituted the armed action of a minority; this put the Platformists firmly within a tactical framework of leninism. This was not the first — or last — time that anarchists would flirt with the more authoritarian aspects of radical theory and practice. Many anarchists would disagree with this assessment of the Platform.

The main lesson of the anarchist presence in relation to the first two Internationals is that socialists prefer anarchists to be invisible and silent. That of the revolutionary experiences of Mexico, Russia, and Spain shows that for socialists, the only good anarchist is pro-government or dead. Loyally fighting for a Mexican Constitution didn't slacken the resolve of Mexico's rulers in outlawing and repressing anarcho-syndicalists who insisted on exercising their legal rights to organize radical trade unions. Helping to make revolutionary changes in cooperation with the Bolsheviks didn't protect the anarchists from the wrath of Lenin and his cohorts when the anarchists insisted on remaining attached to libertarian principles and tactics. Neither did being part of a coalition of leftists and liberals in opposition to fascism shelter anarchists from the homicidal rivalry of stalinists and social

democrats twenty years later.

The '60s and '70s

The social upheavals beginning in 1968 ended the near total eclipse of anarchism in the years following the Spanish experience. The formation of the New Left in the preceding few years, precipitated by examples of non-Soviet socialist alternatives (the Chinese, Cuban, Yugoslavian, Albanian, Korean, or Vietnamese models) resurrected an interest in unconventional and non-conformist aspects of political theory, which led to a renewed study of anarchist and non-leninist revolutionary history. Tactics of anarchist organizing were adopted by non-anarchists because of their assumed inherent anti-hierarchical nature (in keeping with egalitarian presumptions, as was the trend of those early days): consensus decision-making, affinity groups, rotating leadership or the lack of any and all formal leaders.

These outward forms (characteristics) of quasi-egalitarianism were usually accompanied by the celebration of various nationalist movements that had emerged in the context of global anti-colonial struggles, giving birth to an odd hybrid: pseudo-anarchic nationalist revolutionaries — activists who adopted the anarchist slogan “smash the state” while at the same time carrying the flag of the NLF (National Liberation Front, or “Viet Cong”), a stalinist popular front whose declared aim was the consolidation and centralization of the Vietnamese state. To anti-imperialists, some states are better than others, especially if they are in conflict with the United States. The problem, from an anarchist perspective, is that the goal of this strategy is to smash a particular state, not statism or government in general.

The response of '60s militants to legal repression and the rise of third worldism contributed to the disintegration of the New Left, which began in earnest when the revolutionary potential of the working classes in imperialist countries was played down and eventually dismissed. This theoretical innovation was accompanied by the rise of urban guerrilla groups; the military actions of an elitist anti-imperialist vanguard were substituted for the self-activity of “the masses,” especially the working masses. The exploits of these violent militants superficially hearkened back to the years of anarchist propaganda by the deed: bank robberies, bombings, assassinations. From the mid-1880s through the 1920s, some anarchists engaged in spectacular violent and illegal actions. The idea behind this unorganized but widespread strategy was to prod normally complacent workers into mass revolutionary activity by showing the vulnerability of bourgeois society and of individual political and economic leaders in particular. It didn't work, and was largely abandoned as counterproductive, but the popular association of anarchism with violence and mayhem was cemented.

The similar tactics of armed struggle groups and anarchists of the previous century led to the equation of the two tendencies in the analyses of many observers. As often as the media and various officials portrayed all violent political groups as “anarchist,” the groups themselves never tired of pointing out (to anyone who would listen) that they were not anarchists at all, but communists or socialists or progressives or nationalists or leftists.

Having the actions of urban guerrillas (fighting the imperialist state in solidarity with third world national liberationists) equated with those of armed anarchists (combating the state in solidarity with anyone — including themselves — who is oppressed by authoritarian social relations regardless of the political ideology of their rulers) must have been maddening to

the leftists of the '70s. Their ideological forebears had been struggling for the previous 150 years to be rid of the stigma of anarchism, only to have it foisted on them again because of a similarity of tactics. But the leftists had only themselves to blame for this confusion since they had already appropriated an important term from the vocabulary of anarchism: direct action.

Characteristics Vs. Definitions

In the anarchist tradition the term direct action was never used as a euphemism for violence, unlike propaganda by the deed. It simply referred to any consciously political act that took place outside the realm of electoralism and other forms of statecraft: decision-making that uses mandated and revocable delegates instead of representatives, and creating mutual-aid networks instead of relying on welfare are two examples. In a general sense then, direct action refers to actions that encourage and expand the self-activity of any person or group without resorting to the institutions of the state. Polite or violent public protests, on the other hand, are undertaken in the hopes that policy makers can be influenced to implement legislative reform; this is the liberal (/conservative) or leftist (/rightist) strategy of appealing to political leaders' good will and/or fear. Since this strategy relies on the actions of people not directly involved, it has nothing to do with an anarchist understanding of direct action.

Registering public dissatisfaction with government policies (by marching, demonstrating, fighting cops, destroying property, expropriating banks, liberating prisoners, assassinating political/industrial leaders) is agitation and propaganda, not direct action. The effects of such activity on creating and sustaining anti-hierarchical communities beyond the clutches of politicians are extremely limited. It may make anarchism attractive to some people — which is exactly the point of propaganda (by the deed or idea) — but the point of direct action is to become accustomed to making decisions using anti-hierarchical methods, and then implementing positive egalitarian alternatives to statist ways of living. Unfortunately, most activist anarchists have adopted the leftist usage of direct action, meaning any angry confrontation with the state, rather than the traditional anarchist definition: ignoring the state.

This confusion is the result of substituting characteristics for definitions. Anarchism has a definition. It is a discrete political theory and practice; to be an anarchist means to be against all government. A social change movement might be decentralized, use some form of direct democracy (the mandated delegate model, for example), call for international solidarity, and use non-anarchist direct action (in the leftist sense of using limited violence or property destruction to further their programs), but these are characteristics of antiauthoritarian methods, not a definition of anarchism. If these tactics are used as part of a strategy for gaining legal recognition or influencing and/or implementing legislation, then those who use them cannot be anarchists; not because some self-appointed guardian of the ideology says so, but because anarchism is anti-legislative by definition. Anarchists are not frustrated liberals with an attitude, nor are they impatient authoritarian socialists unafraid to pick up a gun.

Conclusions

Maintaining a minority position of principled antiauthoritarianism within a larger

authoritarian framework, as anarcho-leftists insist upon doing in relation to the Left, is naive at best. This brief historical survey has hopefully provided ample examples of the suicidal nature of such a project. Leftists want neither a loyal opposition nor a radical conscience, and they have made it abundantly clear over the last 150 years that they don't like anarchists and prefer not to have them around, cluttering up their moves for polite and safely legislated social change or sudden military *coups d'etat*. Leftist anarchists consistently refuse to learn from the history of the interactions between their ideological predecessors and their desperately desired contemporary anti-anarchist allies. Involvement in non- (and anti-) anarchist fronts and alliances tends to make anarchists suspend the pursuit of their unique goals.

The conflicts that have existed between authoritarian socialists and anarchists have not gone away. Whether it's the tension between centralization and federalism, nationalism and internationalism, the role of the individual in relation to society and the state, or the more fundamental issue of statecraft (electoralism, agitating for legislative reform, etc) versus direct action, anarchists stand in opposition to the issues and programs of all kinds of leftists. The leftist agenda is predicated on the use of legislation, representative government and all of its coercive institutions, centralized economic planning by technocrats and other experts, and a commitment to hierarchical social relations.

Promoting self-activity, egalitarian interpersonal and social relations, and cultivating a critical perspective are among the best aspects of anarchism. As such, they are worth extending. Accepting spoon-fed solutions and programs, engaging in non-reciprocal solidarity with leftists, and other characteristics of ideological myopia need to be discarded. Anarchists, with their emphasis on the principles of mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, and direct action, cannot share a common agenda with contemporary leftists any more than they could 150 years ago.

A return to authentically anarchist principles, coupled with some understanding of the troubled history of the relationship between leftists and anarchists, can go a long way toward reinvigorating antiauthoritarian theory and practice. At the same time, moving beyond the melioristic beliefs (especially about western European technology, culture, and science) of 19th century anarchism, which have made the programs of anarchists and leftists seem similar, is crucial. The relevance of anarchist self-activity can only increase when the vestiges of authoritarian leftist assumptions and distortions are discarded from the words and behavior of antiauthoritarian activists, critics, and theorists.

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