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> …I found, again and again, that the conclusions I slowly and imperfectly arrived at were already fully and demonstrably (and I may say, beautifully) expressed by Karl Marx. So I too was a Marxist! I decided with pleasure, for it is excellent to belong to a tradition and have wise friends. This was Marx as a social psychologist. But as regards political action…it never seemed to me that the slogans of the Marxians, nor even of Marx, led to fraternal socialism (that… requires the absence of state or other coercive power); rather they led away from it. Bakunin was better. Kropotkin I agree with. (Paul Goodman, 1962; p. 34)

The current world-wide revival of anarchism is premised on the decline of Marxism. Yet there remains a strand of Marxism (libertarian or autonomist Marxism) to which anarchists often feel close and whose followers often express a closeness to anarchism. Its libertarian-democratic, humanist, and anti-statist qualities permit

anarchists to use valuable aspects of Marxism (such as the economic analysis or the theory of class struggle). Yet it still contains the main weaknesses of Marxism. And in certain ways it has the same weaknesses of much of anarchism, rather than being an alternative. This version of Marxism has much to offer anarchists but remains fundamentally flawed, as I will argue.

From at least the Thirties to the Eighties, anarchism was marginal, in an international left which was dominated by Marxism. While the Sixties in the U.S began with calls for "participatory democracy," the period ended with chants of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, The NLF is Gonna Win!" and appeals to Mao's Little Red Book — that is, to support of barbaric Stalinist states. Even the libertarian aspects of Marxism — such as working class organization or the goal of a society with unalienated labor — were ignored.

But the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and the Soviet Union soon followed. China embraced an openly market-based capitalism. To a great extent, Marxism was discredited. However, world capitalism has not improved — the collapse of Russian state capitalism was really part of the global crisis of capitalism. So, much of the growing opposition, which previously would have gone into varieties of Marxism, has currently channeled itself into the alternate radicalism, anarchism.

The history of defeat and betrayal on the part of Marxism has come in two great waves. From the time of Engels on, there was the creation of the social democratic parties of Europe. With little strategy beyond getting elected to parliament, they built mass parties and practical-bureaucratic unions, until everything went crash in World War I. Then most of the parties supported "their own" imperialist governments and fought against fellow members of the Socialist International. After World War I, they opposed the Russian Revolution and sabotaged revolutions in their own countries, especially Germany. In the Thirties they failed to fight fascism, particularly Nazism. Uncritically supporting Allied imperialism in World War II, they next became agents of U.S. imperialism

in the Cold War. By now, the European social democratic and labor parties have completely abandoned any belief in a new sort of society, advocating only a weak form of liberalism, if not outright neoliberalism.

During World War I, Lenin, Trotsky, and others determined to have a new beginning, to return to the revolutionary roots of Marxism in a new International. The result, as is well known, was Stalinist state capitalism in Russia, and the creation of Stalinist parties everywhere. The Stalinists utterly failed to lead any working class revolutions in Europe or elsewhere (which was the original goal of the project). New Communist Party states were formed only by the Russian army or by peasant armies led by declassé intellectuals — that is, by non-working class forces. After creating piles of corpses, Russian state capitalism bogged down in its own inefficiency, and eventually collapsed. Its legacy is the misery of Eastern Europe and a large part of Asia. Existing Communist Parties are as liberal as the existing social democratic parties.

In addition to these two great failures of Marxism, Trotsky's attempt to recreate Leninist Marxism in a new Fourth International was another failure. The various Trotskyist trends of today are variants of Stalinism, nationalism, and/or social democratic reformism.

This history would seem to have completely discredited Marxism. After all, Marxism is not just nice ideas, like Christianity. It is supposed to be a praxis, a theory-and-practice. As Engels often quoted, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." Massive failure should discredit it.

However, Marxism continues to have an attraction on the left, especially as the memory of state-capitalist Communism fades. It has a body of theory — whole libraries of theory — and a history of experiences in all the great revolutions from 1848 on. Anarchism, on the other hand, is notoriously thin in its theory, and its revolutionary experience is ambiguous. Therefore many anarchists look for a strand of Marxism which may be consistent with what is valuable in anarchism.

This minority trend in Marxism has been called libertarian Marxism, or following Harry Cleaver, 2000) autonomist Marxism ("libertarian" here has nothing to do with the right-wing, propertarian, Libertarians of the U.S.). Historically contributing tendencies are the European "council communists" after World War I, and the "Johnson-Forest Tendency" (C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskya) of the Forties and Fifties, which came out of the Trotskyist movement, as did Castoriadis' Socialism or Barbarism group in France. There were also the French Situationists, and the more recent German and Italian "autonomous" movements. (Surprisingly, I have rarely seen U.S. references to William Morris, the great British utopian Marxist of the 1880s.) Dunayevskya's folowers are still functioning as the News and Letters Committee. Castoriadis is particularly interesting in that he and his group evolved from libertarian Marxism out of Marxism altogether (Curtis, 1997; Dunayevskaya, 1992; Glaberman, 1999; Rachleff, 1976).

Many anarchists look favorably on these varieties of libertarian Marxism. Noam Chomsky, in an introduction to a book on anarchism, quotes Anton Pannekoek of the council communists and concludes, "In fact, radical Marxism merges with anarchist currents" (1970; p. xv). Some Marxists reject the connection. Antonio Negri, the leading thinker of the Italian autonomists, declares in his influential book Empire, "...We are not anarchists but communists..." (Hardt & Negri, 2001; p. 350). But Cleaver, the autonomist Marxist (he may have invented the term), has written a paper (1993) which argues for strong "similarities" between Kropotkin and Cleaver's brand of Marxism. Two followers of C.L.R. James write, "Marxism can mean anything from a libertarian anarchism to Stalinist totalitarian dictatorship. We tend in the first direction..." (Glaberman & Faber, 1998; p. 2). In a sense, this is the last chance for Marxism to prove it can be liberating...or just decent.

Anarchists may agree or disagree with much of Marx's economic or political analysis. To anarchists, what is most positive about these libertarian trends in Marxism is a belief in the self-activity

Root and Branch (1975). *Root and Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements*. Greenwich, CN: Fawcett Publications

of the working classes. They reject the notion that an elite (in the form of a party) could stand in for the workers and take power for the workers. Instead they point to the creation of workers' and popular councils formed in every revolutionary upheaval (Root and Branch, 1975). These, they feel, should unite as the new power, replacing the old state forms. Rather than focusing on the politics of the tops of the big bureaucratic unions, they look at shop floor struggles, showing how workers' initiative affects the process of production in a day to day way (Glaberman & Faber, 1998). They study how mass strikes can take off, beyond the limits set by the union officials (Brecher, 1972). Their interest has been in the creativity of the working class and all the oppressed, which Negri and Cleaver have called its "self-valorization." Some of the most valuable revolutionary thinking on Black liberation was developed by C. L. R. James — although his ideas were mostly developed before he had broken with Trotskyism (McLemee, 1996).

During the Great Depression and the Cold War, when the anarchists were few, autonomous Marxists kept alive ideas of the self-activity of the workers. They maintained a revolutionary opposition to Stalinism as well as to Western capitalism. They correctly analyzed Stalinism as state capitalism, rather than some sort of society moving toward socialism (degenerated workers' state, postcapitalist society, transitional state, etc.). They declared that the post-World War II capitalist boom was fundamentally flawed. They predicted it would eventually end — as it did in the Sixties (Mattick, 1969). Anarchists can appreciate all of this.

The libertarian Marxists sought to reinterpret Marxism from the orthodox versions taught by the social democrats or Stalinists. Mainstream Marxism sees the historical process rolling on in an automatic way, stage following stage, antithesis following thesis, until capitalism has reached its final stage (optimistically referred to as "late capitalism" or "the last stage of capitalism"), to be inexorably followed by socialism and then communism. History for the orthodox Marxists is something that happens to people

as opposed to something which people do. To them, "class consciousness" means that the workers become aware of what they are required to do by the historical process. The phrase sometimes quoted from Hegel is, "Freedom is the recognition of necessity." Often referring to socialism as "inevitable," the mainstream theorists of Marxism see socialism as the invariable outcome of the automatic processes of social development. Naturally, opponents of Marxism, from the right to the left, have pointed out that even if a thing seems inevitable that does not mean that it should be desired. What is there about socialism that workers (let alone others) should struggle and sacrifice for? Orthodox Marxism does not answer this.

The attempts of the libertarian Marxists to shake free of Marxist automaticity (as I shall refer to it) have not been fully successful. They cannot be fully successful, given that it is not a misinterpretation of Marxism, but is a central part of Marx's Marxism. The whole point of Capital is that socialism must happen. But you can read volumes of Marx's writings (and I have) without finding any statement of why socialism is good or worth striving for. However, Marx makes plenty of criticisms of the utopians and anarchists for raising moral reasons in support of socialism.

This automatic and amoral conception of Marxism had its negative effects. For the Bolsheviks it became a rationale for tyranny. Believing the party knew the absolute truth about what must happen (that is, having correct class consciousness), and sure it was only implementing historically necessary tasks, they felt justified in killing or oppressing others — for the sake of human liberation, of course. After all, they knew it would come out all right in the end.

For the social democrats, this amoral automaticity justified a passive, nonrevolutionary policy. As stated, they built political parties which ran in elections, and they supported mass unions which negotiated with business. Otherwise they had no strategy except to keep going. Meanwhile they committed their own atrocities by sup-

Cleaver, H. (2000). *Reading Capital Politically*. San Francisco, CA: AK Press.

Cleaver, H. (1993). In T.V. Cahill, ed. *Anarchist Studies*. Lancaster, UK: Lancaster University (2/24/93).

Curtis, D.A. (1997). (Ed. and trans.). *The Castoriadis Reader*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Dunayevskya, R. (1992). *The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State Capitalism*. Chicago: News and Letters.

Glaberman, M. (1999). *Marxism for Our Time: C.L.R. James on Revolutionary Organization*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Glaberman, M. & Faber, S. (1998). *Working for Wages: The Roots of Insurgency*. Dix Hills, NY: General Hall.

Goodman, P. (1962). *Drawing the Line: A Pamphlet*. NY: Random House. Partially reprinted in P. Goodman (1979) *Drawing the Line: The Political Essays of Paul Goodman* (T. Stoehr, ed.). NY: E.P. Dutton.

Hardt, M., & Negri, A. (2000). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Malatesta, E. (1984). *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*. V. Richards, ed. London: Freedom Press.

Mattick, P. (1969). *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy*. Boston: Porter Sargent.

McLemee, S. (1996). (Ed.). *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question."* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Rachleff, P. J. (1976). *Marxism and Council Communism: The Foundation for Revolutionary Theory for Modern Society*. New York: Revisionist Press.

ing out that there is no necessary connection between each issue. They need to be thought out separately.

Autonomous Marxism, then, is weak in the same areas that much of anarchism is weak. It does not see the need for self-organization of revolutionaries. It is strategically inflexible, in particular opposed to working inside unions, the main mass organizations of the working class. And it has not been able to transcend key weaknesses of Marxism, particularly the automaticity of the Marxist view of history.

There is a great deal in Marxism that can be mined by anarchists. In particular, Marxism shows the connection between the functioning of capitalism and the development of a working class capable of self-activity, moving toward the creation of a revolutionary socialist society. But Marxism, as Marxism, is not just a collection of concepts, which can be taken or left in bits. It was meant to be a whole, the total worldview of a new class. It included an economics (value analysis), a political strategy (electoralism), a method of social analysis (historical materialism), and a philosophy of nature (dialectical materialism) — everything but an ethics or a moral vision. It stands or falls all of a piece. As it turned out, Marxism was not the program of the working class, as was intended, but the program of a state capitalist ruling class.

In some ways it is comparable to liberalism. Much in anarchism derives from classical liberalism. Anarchists agree with the liberal ideas of free speech, free association, pluralism, federalism, democracy, and self-determination. But liberalism today is the left face of imperialist capitalism and we are not liberals! So too, while much should be gained from Marxism, socialists who believe in liberation are better off being anarchists

Brecher, J. (1972). *Strike!* San Francisco: Straight Arrow (Rolling Stone).

Chomsky, N. (1970). "Introduction". In D. Guerin (1970). Anarchism. NY: Monthly Review Press.

porting their states' imperialisms. They too felt it would come out all right in the end. This acceptance of capitalist development, this surety that it would lead to socialism, led Marxists to accept other aspects of capitalism. The anti-ecological technology of capitalism, forged for the purposes of exploitation, was endorsed. So were all centralizing tendencies in economic, political, and military organization, which were to produce such human disasters.

This is not to deny that there are real tendencies in capitalism which push toward socialist freedom, especially the struggle of the working class, as Marx taught. But there are countertendencies (such as the tendency of the better-off workers to be bought off and the worse-off workers to give up). There is no automaticity, no inevitability, about the socialist revolution. Capitalism will not create socialism for us.

Some of the libertarian Marxists, such as James and Dunayevskya and their followers, have sought to break out of the mechanical version of Marxism by going back to Hegel's philosophy. This is a dead end. It is true that Hegel's dialectics portray the world as moving in a dynamic, contradictory, and interconnected (almost ecological) fashion, rather than mechanically and rigidly . But he still saw history as following an automatic process, moving to its inevitable end. That end was the creation of Hegel's philosophy — and, in society, the Prussian monarchy — as the culmination of history. The News and Letters organization seems to see itself as existing in order to explain to the workers the relation between their actions and the philosophy of Hegel. To organize activists to go off into ever deeper studies of this highly alienated and authoritarian version of reality (bringing Hegel to the workers) is its own form of elitism. Marx freed himself from Hegel and it is a mistake to go back.

Cleaver (who does not refer to Hegel much) also shows a similar failure to overcome Marxist automaticity, even when he most thinks he has gone beyond it. For example, he praises Kropotkin (Cleaver, 1993) for showing how aspects of the future were already

appearing, for showing how present forces would become the future. In contrast, he specifically rejects George Woodcock's interpretation that Kropotkin was raising things as mere possibilities which could or might happen. And he rejects any analysis which is concerned with what should or ought to be in the future. Instead, Cleaver's Kropotkin focused on indications in the present of what would lawfully and certainly develop into communist anarchism.

It is interesting that it is just this aspect of Kropotkin which Malatesta criticized. Errico Malatesta, the great Italian anarchist, wrote his "Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend" (1977; pp. 257–268), as a memorial to Kropotkin. Kropotkin's main "two errors," which he especially criticized, were a "mechanistic fatalism" and "his excessive optimism." Malatesta implied that these faults led to Kropotkin's betrayal of anarchism by his support for the Western Allies in World War I (the Germans were supposedly interfering with the automatic development of cooperation and free association in the Allied nations). Cleaver does not mention this, although it has to be accounted for by any admirer of Kropotkin.

This mechanical automaticity of the libertarian Marxists does not flow through a party-concept but, in their thinking, through the masses. They are confident that ultimately the workers will do things right. The libertarians show little appreciation for the mixed consciousness among the workers, influenced by the unending pounding of the mass media. They deny the need to organize in order to fight against conservative or social democratic or Stalinist forces within the working class. As Marxists, the autonomists are passive before the forces of history.

Similarly, the council communists rejected the very idea that socialism could succeed in the oppressed nations, because they were too poor and technologically delayed to develop a society of plenty, which socialism (communism) required. Therefore council communists accepted capitalism (or state capitalism) as the best the oppressed nations could do in this period. They did not see that the neo-colonial countries are part of the world system of capitalism

and therefore workers' revolutions there were an essential part of a world socialist revolution.

Due to this acceptance of Marxist automaticity, the libertarian Marxists are unfortunately weak in much the same areas many anarchists are or even worse. There has been a strand of anarchism in favor of building anarchist revolutionary organizations which can work inside mass organizations such as (but not only) unions (Malatesta, or Makhno's "platformist" movement). But the libertarian Marxists have been so traumatized by Leninism that they reject almost all revolutionary organization — making it almost impossible to understand why they themselves organize, if they do. (However, Castoriadis was for developing an organization and Socialism or Barbarism had a split over this issue.)

Believing that the workers will make everything come out right in the end, libertarian Marxists tend to be passive in relationship to issues of strategy or organization. The weirdest example is a statement by the Italian autonomist Marxist, Antonio Negri (and M. Hardt, 2000): "Against the common wisdom that the U.S. proletariat is weak because of its low party and union representation with respect to Europe…perhaps we should see it as strong for precisely those reasons. Working class power resides not in the representative institutions but in the antagonism and autonomy of the workers themselves" (p. 269). By this argument, the drastic decline in union numbers in the U.S., and the victories of union busters, have made the U.S. workers even stronger. When all the unions are destroyed, the workers will be strongest of all! Why then do the capitalists work to defeat unions?

The council communists were right against Lenin in opposing a party-state and favoring a system of councils. But this does not prove that they were right on other matters, particularly Lenin's advocacy of tactical and strategic flexibility. They were right against Lenin when they opposed electoralism but were wrong to oppose participation in unions. I am not arguing this here, but I am point-