

Marxism

Lecture Six: Marxism and anarchism

Reading suggestions: Mikhail Bakunin, 'Where I stand' (1862), 'Revolutionary catechism' (1866), 'Power corrupts the best' (1867) – all on www.marxists.org; Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism: what it really stands for' (1911; see collection, *Anarchism and other essays*); Carol Ehrlich, 'Socialism, anarchism & feminism' (1979 – best googled). **Viewing:** *Land and Freedom* (Ken Loach 1995).

1. Marxism and anarchism

- As with 'social democracy' (cf. lecture four), important difference between contemporary and 19th century understandings of relationship between socialism/communism/Marxism and anarchism:
 - o Contemporary (incorrect) caricature: Marxism about abolishing private property; anarchism about abolishing state and other authority/hierarchy. More accurate picture: **both** Marxism and anarchism ultimately want to abolish **both** private property and the state, in favour of self-governing workers' collectives (vision often associated with 'anarcho-syndicalism').

'Contrary to popular belief, all social anarchists are socialists. That is, they want to take wealth out of the hands of the few and redistribute it among all members of the community. And they believe that people need to co-operate with each other as a community, instead of living as isolated individuals.' (Ehrlich, 1977)

- o Marxists and large contingent of anarchists coexisted in First International; all identified as socialists (socialism and anarchism not seen as mutually exclusive or rival categories).
- Yet the tensions between anarchist and non-anarchist (e.g. Marxist) currents very real, in Marx's time as now.
 - o Marxists: anarchists as 'idealistic', 'utopian', lacking analysis – i.e. not *wissenschaftlich* (cf. M's critique of Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* – discussed in lecture four); doomed to failure.
 - o Anarchists (e.g. Bakunin): non-anarchist socialism such as that of Marx = 'authoritarian socialism'; doomed to failure.

2. Marx and Bakunin

'As far as learning was concerned, Marx was, and still is incomparably more advanced than I. I knew nothing at that time of political economy, I had not yet rid myself of my metaphysical aberrations, and my socialism was only instinctive. Although younger than I, he was already an atheist, a conscious materialist, and an informed socialist. It was precisely at this time that he was elaborating the foundations of his system as it stands today. We saw each other often. I greatly respected him for his learning and for his passionate devotion - though it was always mingled with vanity - to the cause of the proletariat. I eagerly sought his conversation, which was always instructive and witty when it was not inspired by petty hate, which alas! was only too often the case. There was never any frank intimacy between us - our temperaments did not permit it. He called me a sentimental idealist, and he was right; I called him vain, perfidious, and cunning, and I also was right.' (Bakunin, *Recollections on Marx and Engels*, 1869-71)

'Bakunin has become a monster, a huge mass of flesh and fat, and is barely capable of walking any more. To crown it all, he is sexually perverse and jealous of the seventeen year-old Polish girl who married him in Siberia because of his martyrdom. He is presently in Sweden, where he is hatching "revolution" with the Finns.' (Marx, 1863 Letter to Engels)

- **Expulsion of Bakunin from First International** at Hague Congress 1872 (cf. last week's handout). **NB.:** *almost everything about this is a matter of historical and interpretative controversy, esp. between anarchist and Marxist sympathisers. But can note:*
 - i. Clash of personalities (see passages above); long-standing tension.
 - ii. Bakunin expelled for maintaining secret organisation within the International (organisation certainly existed, though extent, significance and motivation of secrecy contested).
 - iii. Bakunin was anti-Semitic, regarding Jews and Germans (Marx was both) as inherently authoritarian: 'This whole Jewish world, comprising a single exploiting sect, a kind of blood sucking people, a kind of organic destructive collective parasite, going beyond not only the frontiers of states, but of political opinion, this world is now, at least for the most part, at the disposal of Marx on the one hand, and of Rothschild on the other... This may seem strange. What can there be in common between socialism and a leading bank? The point is that authoritarian socialism, Marxist communism, demands a strong centralisation of the state. And where there is centralisation of the state, there must necessarily be a central bank, and where such a bank exists, the parasitic Jewish nation, speculating with the Labour of the people, will be found.'
 - iv. Marx and Bakunin seem to identify the crux of the conflict in different places: for Bakunin, M's perceived **authoritarianism** is the main point (M 'lacks the instinct of liberty - he remains from head to foot an authoritarian', *Recollections on Marx and Engels, 1869-71*); whereas for Marx, emphasis not so clearly on attacking B's anti-authoritarian or vindicating his own authoritarianism (M probably would not accept that view of himself anyway). Rather, M attacks B in much the same way as he attacks those he sees as 'utopian socialists' in general: for being insufficiently worldly, **insufficiently rooted in proper analysis** (B: 'he called me a sentimental idealist...').

But NB.: Bakunin doesn't see himself as rejecting M's analysis, and declares himself to have benefitted from it. In 1872 letter:

"Marx, as a thinker, is on the right track. He has established as a principle that all the political, religious and legal evolutions in history are not causes, but effects of the economic evolutions. It is a great and productive thought, that he has not absolutely invented: it has been glimpsed, expressed in part, by many others than him; but finally, to him belongs the honour of having solidly established it and having posited it as the basis of his whole economic system." ("To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain" (1872))

- v. (as above passage shows), **not a straightforward disagreement between 'materialism' and 'idealism'**. Bakunin: "Undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists right. Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history." (Bakunin, *God and the State*, 1871).

So, *just* a personality clash? Answer: disagreement more one of transitional theory than of end sought. Yet even here there is a lot of common ground (e.g. shared commitment to workers' self-emancipation; shared acceptance of use of force). Clash lies in attitudes towards i) **the role of the state and the political party** within the project of transforming society, and also ii) **the role of the proletariat as agent of revolution** (Bakunin more accepting of role for peasantry and *Lumpenproletariat*, whilst M insists on unique revolutionary class).

3. Revolutionary means

- Anarchists and Marxists both state a commitment to **a future society that is both classless and stateless**, but whilst Marx famously holds that the State will **'wither away'** at some point after its seizure by the proletariat, **anarchists regard this as naïve**, and argue that new power elites will emerge and that those who have found themselves in control of the State will cling on to it at any cost (cf. fettering thesis (lecture three)). Kornegger (1975): 'the means create the ends, [...] a strong State becomes self-perpetuating':
 - o Bakunin: 'Power corrupts the best' (1867): anarchists "realise that power and authority corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them."; if the Marxists were successful in seizing power, **they would create a party dictatorship** "all the more dangerous because it appears as a sham expression of the people's will." (Bakunin)
- Both Marxists and anarchists have been open to efforts to achieve **reforms** (e.g. to improve condition of working class). But Marxists have been more willing to operate through political parties than anarchists, who generally refuse to take part in government and have advocated **direct action** as means; commitment to **pre-figuration**, change through non-hierarchical organisations.
- Anarchists and Marxists also share commitment to **self-emancipation** (e.g. Bakunin: "revolution should not only be made for the people's sake; it should also be made by the people."; Malatesta: 'We anarchists do not want to emancipate the people – we want the people to emancipate themselves.').
 - o Question is WHAT COUNTS as e.g. 'self-emancipation'? (possible to ask same Q about 'political party', 'government', 'parliamentary means')
- Q: how does this relate to material of last week, i.e. Marxist critiques of 'bourgeois' reformist or 'opportunist' socialism (which also often involves accusation of too uncritical attitude towards state power)? Critique of certain socialists, like Lassalle (Marx) and Bernstein (Luxemburg), was that they were too embroiled in existing (inc. state) political structures, and that this prevented them from being properly revolutionary / genuinely socialist. Anarchism as taking this thought further / applying it to Marxism?
- Central: question of how to **transform social world from within**, without **being absorbed by it** (as in *co-optation*). Again always a question as to *what counts as which...*