

A reply to Louis Proyect's "A Marxist Critique of Bakunin"

Or "how not to critique anarchism."

Anarcho

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As in any social movement which is just beginning, the current "anti-globalisation" movement is a mixed bag with contradictory ideas. This is to be expected. Only by discussion and activity can those involved clarify and develop their political ideas. Part of this process is, by necessity, a critical evaluation of past social movements and revolutionary ideals. This, again, is natural and positive. Without discussion, without honest and principled debate, any movement with stagnant.

Sadly, Louis Proyect's "A Marxist Critique of Bakunin" is not honest nor principled. Rather, it is little more than a confused (and somewhat hysterical) cobbling together of Marxist prejudices and fallacies. His essay proves Albert Meltzer's comments:

"It is very difficult for Marxist-Leninists to make an objective criticism of Anarchism, as such, because by its nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. If Marxism is held out to be indeed **the** basic working class philosophy, and the proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone but itself, it is hard to go back on it and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it. Marxism therefore normally tries to refrain from criticising anarchism as such – unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarianism .. and concentrates its attacks not on **anarchism**, but on **anarchists**... Because of the lack of any other criticism of the Anarchists, the Leninists – especially the Trotskyists – to this day use the **personal criticism** method." [*Anarchism: Arguments for and Against*, pp. 37–8]

As will become clear, when looking at Bakunin's work Proyect does two things. Firstly, he constantly and deliberately distorts Bakunin's ideas. Secondly, he ignores the important parts of Bakunin's work and concentrates more on style than substance. Proyect is like the man who, when given gemstones, spends his time looking at the box they came in!

As such, his critique is so flawed that it may make the reader wonder why I bothered to reply to it (and when I was writing this reply that thought crossed my mind on more than one occasion!). There are three reasons. Firstly, I hate to see distortions being spread. The fact is that

many Marxists will spread Proyect's nonsense around on the assumption that he knows what he is talking about. As such, it is useful to nip the spread of disinformation before it gets going (this also explains the length of the reply, as it refuting of nonsense requires evidence and argument, unlike the spreading of it). Secondly, it is useful for anarchist propaganda to reply to such nonsense. By showing up the distortions of Bakunin inflicted upon us by a "Marxist" then I can hopefully make readers wonder how revolutionary a theory is if its adherents sink to such levels to combat other radicals. Equally, it allows me to expound the **real** differences between anarchism and "Marxism," which may result in a **real** debate between the two theories gets going. Thirdly, there is the possibility of making a few jokes at Proyect's expense. His contempt of other activists (particularly anarchists and the readers of his essay!) is clear. His lack of respect deserves a similar reply (and it allows me to make a somewhat boring task more interesting).

Before starting, I must note that I use the term "Marxism" here to describe Louis' position. Obviously there are Marxists out there who reject this kind of shoddy historical slander hiding behind the screen of political analysis. Similarly, there are Marxists who reject the authoritarian and elitist politics of Leninism and Trotskyism. I use the word to describe the mainstream of Marxism, not its libertarian elements. So, please bear this in mind when reading this reply.

Proyect could have saved us all a lot of pain by pondering these words by Malatesta and used them to understand Bakunin's place in anarchism. As Malatesta argued in 1876, anarchists are not "Bakuninists." This was because "we do not share all the practical and theoretical ideas of Bakunin" and because "we follow ideas, not men; because we reject the habit of incarnating a principle in a man, a habit which is worthy of political parties but completely incompatible with the tendencies of modern socialism. Furthermore, it should be noted that Bakunin himself has always protested against this adjective being applied to his friends."

Simply put, anarchists are not Bakuninists and we do not look at any famous anarchist's work as some sort of holy book which we must learn by heart. When anarchists read, say, Bakunin we look for what insights he has which are genuinely useful and ignore the rest. For Proyect, this common-sense approach to famous thinkers is obviously foreign. He assumes that anarchists approach Bakunin like he approaches Marx — as someone who can do his thinking for him.

As such, the basis for Proyect's "critique" is flawed. Critiquing Bakunin does not mean critiquing anarchism. To do that, you need to see which aspects of Bakunin's work (and life) anarchists have taken up and critique those. Similarly, Bakunin was not an anarchist all his life. He started becoming an anarchist in 1866 and his ideas developed over the last ten years of his life. Thus to root around in Bakunin's pre-anarchist writings and activities for an insight in anarchism is just as flawed. Sadly, Proyect applies both these flawed methodologies in his essay.

The rationale for Proyect's contribution to this particularly unconvincing school of critique, is obvious. He is concerned the influence of anarchist ideas within the current generation of activists. As he puts it:

"With the advent of 'anti-globalisation' protests, a very old movement seems to be picking up steam once again. This seems to have something to do with fashion."

This "very old" movement is anarchism. He then quotes an "article that appeared in the Style section of the April 4, 2000 Washington Post" on the Anarchist Soccer League as "evidence" for his assertion that this "seems to have something to do with fashion."

It is simply incredible that a Marxist can use the bourgeois media in such a fashion to mock his fellow activists! I was under the impression that revolutionaries would know how objective the capitalist media is to social protests and movements. Apparently I am wrong.

Why is anarchism “picking up steam”? Proyect, in an approach which will become familiar to the unfortunate reader of his essay, eschews any attempt to ground the rise of anarchism in terms of the movement and society it is part of. After all, as a Marxist, Proyect is meant to be a materialist. So why does he subject the reader to the most bland and superficial philosophical idealism by explaining the rise of anarchism in terms of “fashion”?

As an anarchist, and therefore a materialist, I can explain the rise of anarchism without basing it on fashion. Simply put, anarchist ideas and practice obviously appeal to the activists and meet their requirements, requirements based on their practical experience (and lessons from past practice) and their analysis of current society and how to change it.. If anarchism is gaining influence it is because the activists are themselves drawing similar conclusions from their own experiences. But why admit this possibility when you have the power of fashion to explain it?

As will become clear from Proyect’s “analysis” of Bakunin, Proyect’s appeal to “fashion” is not surprising. He constantly stresses the need to study “political economy” (in the “library”?) in order to create a “revolutionary” movement. As such, revolutionary knowledge is not found in the class/social struggle nor in the position of working class people in society. Implicitly repeating Lenin’s infamous argument in “What is to be done?”, for Proyect “revolutionary” theory lies outside the working class and its struggle, from “theoretical” knowledge of the “laws” of capitalism. As such, the actual experiences of activists count for nothing and cannot. True revolutionary politics is in the library and if only activists get the right books out then Marxism will rise again!

The implications of this perspective are clear. As “revolutionary” knowledge cannot come to working class people (including activists) by their own experiences, then nothing positive, nothing capable of creating a new society, can come from their self-activity. At best, they can come to the awareness of the need for “better” leaders who “understand” how “political economy” actually works. Thus the party is the “advanced wing” of the movement and non-party people (the majority) are, by definition, backward. The implications are obvious. In the words of Trotsky:

“The Workers’ Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers’ right to elect representatives – above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party. which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers’ democracy.” [quoted by Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism*, p. 209]

If the masses reject the party then, obviously, they show this ignorance of “revolutionary” ideology and so the party has the right, nay the duty, to impose its dictatorship over them. Similarly, the destruction of organs of working class self-management can be justified because the vanguard has taken power – which is **exactly** what Trotsky argued (and did when he was in power).

As such, Proyect's comments on "fashion" simply expose a perspective which can only lead to (and historically has led to) bureaucratic and authoritarian practices. As we will discuss more fully below, anarchists reject the idea that revolutionary ideas exist independently of the class struggle.

After quoting his bourgeois source, he proclaims:

"One might legitimately question whether this will generate any long-term commitment to revolutionary politics. According to veteran left activist Walt Sheasby, a 1970 news source reported that there were an estimated 2 million U.S. citizens who considered themselves 'revolutionary.' As an SDS organiser, Sheasby witnessed chapters springing up overnight like mushrooms. Many of these young radicals — Ms. Peller's forerunners — were also resistant to ideology.

"He confesses that, 'In various political activities over the last three decades, I've met hardly a handful of those I knew in the sixties. I'm willing to bet other organisers would tell the same tale. It's as if these 'revolutionaries' never lived.' (groups.yahoo.com)"

Proyect is sinking to low levels in attacking the commitment of the current wave of activists like this. If you are resistant to "ideology" (obviously Proyect means his own ideology) then you are not a real revolutionary and have no real commitment! Obviously, as the bourgeois media argues, this is all just a phrase which these young people are going through. Given time, they will overcome this "infantile disorder" (to use Lenin's choice term) and get jobs. Sad, really, that Proyect so easily dismisses so many activists. Perhaps this could explain why Marxists were taken by surprise by this new movement?

Equally, it seems hard to blame the failure of the 1960s radicals on being "resistant to ideology." After all, that movement was quickly infected by various sects trying to recruit "the youth" into their specific ideology (namely the one and only true form of Marxism). If that generation had been more resistant to ideology, then perhaps the 1960s revolt would have had more positive results? After all, numerous self-proclaimed Marxist parties grew in size during the 1960s. Perhaps it was the embracing of "ideology" which caused its downfall?

Which, of course, brings us to the question of the desirability of having an ideology in the first place. I must stress that there is a difference between ideology and theory. I am **not** dismissing the importance of theory. What I am questioning is the turning of theory into an ideology — a set of dogmas which are imposed on reality, which is modified to make it fit into the ideology. As the Situationist influenced slogan put it, "theory is when you have ideas, ideology is when ideas have you." Proyect's essay is an example of this.

As such, if the current generation of activists are rejecting ideology and developing their own theory based on a critical dialogue with revolutionary thinkers and their own experiences, then this is an extremely positive sign. While some activists may take the healthy rejection of ideology too far and reject the need for theory, it is extremely doubtful that the majority of activists do this. The fact that many activists are embracing anarchist ideas, theory and practice suggests that those ideas seem more relevant to their needs than, say, Proyect's ideology. Ultimately, Proyect's comments just reflect his negative opinions of social activists rather than an objective evaluation of the current social movements. After all, surely activists can evaluate what set of

ideas best equates with their actual experiences and needs? That Project cannot see this suggests a contempt of other activists which is truly amazing.

He moves onto the real issue, namely anarchism:

“Whether the revival of anarchism will turn out to more than just a passing fad is too soon to say. For Marxists, however, its reappearance presents something of a challenge. For Barbara Epstein, writing in the Marxist Monthly Review, it is not only a shot in the arm for the left, but offers the possibility of a kind of arranged marriage between the red and the black down the road.”

“‘Actually existing’ anarchism has changed and so has ‘actually existing’ Marxism. Marxists who participated in the movements of the sixties tend to have a sharper appreciation of the importance of social and cultural equality, and of living according to our values in the present, than did many members of previous generations of Marxist activists. If a new paradigm of the left emerges from the struggle against neoliberalism and the transnational corporate order, it is likely to include elements of anarchist sensibility as well as of Marxist analysis.’

“All of this suggests that the marriage will combine Marxist brains and anarchist heart. It is entirely possible that the anarchist targets of Professor Epstein’s affections might spurn these advances. Indeed, based on my encounters with anarchists on the Internet, I am left with the impression that not only do they have their own analysis regarded as vastly superior to Marxism, but are not bashful about saying so.”

In this Project is right (I never thought I would write that!). Anarchists do consider our own analysis vastly superior to “Marxism” — that is why we are Anarchists! Nor are we “bashful” in saying so. But anarchists do not dismiss Marxism out of hand. Certain forms of Marxism (such as council communism, situationism, elements of autonomist Marxism — i.e. libertarian Marxism) are respected by many anarchists. A positive two way dialogue has been going on in anarchist and libertarian Marxist circles which has enriched both. Perhaps it is no co-incidence that this is happening, after all did Lenin not refer to the council communists of the German Communist Workers’ Party as being an “anarchist deviation” and lambaste other “semi-anarchist elements” (i.e. the very groups we are referring to here under the term “libertarian Marxism”).

As such, most anarchists (being free thinkers and not worshippers of idols) embrace what they consider as positive in the contributions of non-anarchist, but revolutionary socialist, writers. For example, the non-Marxist Castoriadis and the (unorthodox) Marxists Pannekoek, Ruhle, Mattick and Cleaver have expounded revolutionary ideas with obvious similarities to anarchist ideas and only a narrow minded ideologue would reject dialogue with such thinkers. Sadly, Project proves he is such a person constantly in his essay. Rather than a fruitful discussion of potential common ground, we have simply the screaming of a priest who is afraid that his flock may be escaping him. In his own words:

“This article is the first in a series that will try to come to terms with anarchist ideology. The chief purpose is not to change anarchist minds. After all, if a movement has maintained an existence for over 150 years without any tangible victories, one might

have to ask whether something other than rational expectations or practical politics keeps it afloat. We instead intend to help clarify the thinking of people like the good Professor Epstein, so that the prospects of an arranged marriage might be less risky for either party. When this kind of intimacy is involved, one should minimise risks.”

So, Proyect is concerned that Marxists may be lost to anarchism if they actually discuss their ideas with us anarchists! Nice to know that anarchism is so attractive. But his comments are worthy of deeper analysis.

Let us dissect them.

“This article is the first in a series that will try to come to terms with anarchist ideology. The chief purpose is not to change anarchist minds.”

This is understandable, as any anarchist will simply laugh at the nonsense Proyect subjects us to in this essay. This is because, unlike Proyect, anarchists actually have read some anarchist theory and many have read the works of Bakunin. Once you do that, it is easy to refute Proyect’s “critique.” Therefore it is wise for Proyect to admit he does not seek to convert the knowledgeable. His target is the ignorant, the many Marxists who have never read anarchist theory and simply repeat parrot-like the inaccurate assertions contained in essays like Proyect’s. Harsh words, I know, but it is rare to find a Marxist article on anarchism which is remotely accurate (see *An Anarchist FAQ*’s section H.2 and the appendix on “Anarchism and Marxism” for a few examples which prove that Proyect’s essay is not an isolated example of Marxists writing about something they do not understand).

He continues:

“After all, if a movement has maintained an existence for over 150 years without any tangible victories, one might have to ask whether something other than rational expectations or practical politics keeps it afloat.”

It must, of course, be noted that all the “victories” of Marxism ended up proving empirical evidence in support of Bakunin’s critiques (and predictions) about Marxism. Social Democracy became as reformist as Bakunin predicted, given its use of “political action.” The Bolshevik revolution quickly became the dictatorship **over** the proletariat as Bakunin, yet again, predicted. With “victories” like these, Marxists do not need defeats!

Therefore, the same can be said of Marxism. After all, where has Marxism actually produced socialism? Well, there is in existence various one-party dictatorships presiding over state capitalist economies which claim to be “Marxist.” If these are “tangible victories” then most people would agree that Proyect really needs a better dictionary. With its track record, we wonder what keeps Proyect’s “Marxism” afloat? But, then again, dead things generally do float..

Anarchists can, of course, point to positive examples of our ideas working in practice (all of which were defeated by superior outside force). The Paris Commune, for example, was obviously influenced by the ideas of Proudhon and, in fact, implemented many of his ideas (such as mandating delegates, the creation of co-operates, a bottom-up federation of communes). Bakunin (unlike Marx) predicted that workers’ councils (based on mandated delegates) would become the framework of a socialist society, decades before Lenin usurped his vision and rhetoric to ensure Bolshevik party rule. During the Russian Revolution, the Makhnovist army in the Ukraine gave

a clear alternative to Bolshevik party dictatorship, fighting both Red and White dictatorship for a federation of free soviets and worker and peasant freedom and self-management. In Italy, the Italian anarchist and syndicalists were at the forefront of the near revolution which accumulated in the factory occupations in 1920. They played an important role in fighting the rise of fascism. Both struggles were betrayed by the Socialist Party and their trade unions. In Spain, the anarcho-syndicalist union the CNT was the driving force of the revolutionary 1930s, leading the resistance against Franco's coup and expropriating the means of production and placing them under workers self-management afterwards. Defeat was ensured by the actions of the Socialists and Communists (with whom the anarchists mistakenly compromised with against the greater evil of Franco). I could go on, but I feel I have proved my point.

Ultimately, Proyect is simply showing his ignorance of both anarchism and reality by his comments.

Proyect continues:

“We instead intend to help clarify the thinking of people like the good Professor Epstein, so that the prospects of an arranged marriage might be less risky for either party. When this kind of intimacy is involved, one should minimise risks.”

In other words, the task Proyect has taken upon himself (and inflicted upon us!) is to “educate” those Marxists and other radicals who may actually try to understand anarchism. This is understandable. Anarchism is a movement and a theory rich in theory, constructive ideas and practice and with a powerful critique of orthodox Marxism. In order to ensure that Marxists do not get exposed to alternative (and more radical) ideas, it is best to “minimise risks” by getting a pre-emptive strike in which paints anarchism in a bad light. If Proyect can put off “people like the good Professor” from studying anarchism more closely, then Marxism can be saved!

How he does this is significant. Rather than address actual anarchist ideas, he rather decides to attack an individual anarchist, namely Bakunin. Rather than critique modern anarchism, its theory and practice, Proyect plays safe and concentrates on someone who died over 125 years ago. Not intent on attacking the long dead, he also adds insult to injury by mostly looking at those aspects of Bakunin's ideas anarchists have rejected and discussing Bakunin's pre-Anarchist work and activity. In addition, he fails to present even a close approximation of his ideas. This is to be understood, as an honest appraisal of anarchism would mean evaluating the ideas that anarchists have taken from Bakunin and not the man himself.

He explains his choice:

“For many reasons, Bakunin is a good place to start in such an investigation. Not only is he a founding father of anarchism, his career developed partly as a series of ideological and organisational challenges to Marx.”

Looking at the article, it seems that most of the “many reasons” for picking Bakunin is that it allows Proyect to, firstly, quote from Bakunin's pre-anarchist days, secondly, to point to Bakunin's personal failings, and, thirdly, to appeal to most Marxist's ignorance Bakunin's ideas to repeat the usual inaccuracies about them. This can be seen from the fact Proyect simply fails to actually discuss Bakunin's main ideas — in other words, most of the ideas which anarchists have taken from Bakunin.

He starts by noting the common roots of Marx and Bakunin in Hegel. He then argues:

“In the early 1840s, as both Marx and Bakunin were struggling to transcend the Hegelian framework, they made contact with socialist and communist circles led by thinkers such as Moses Hess, Wilhelm Weitling and P.J. Proudhon. What unites these early thinkers is their tendency to see the struggle for a classless society in moral or philosophical terms. They hoped to lead European society to a better future through a kind of prophetic denunciation of contemporary ills. Proudhon’s notion that ‘property is theft’ epitomises this approach.”

Unfortunately for this argument, Marx argued that “Not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians he is himself a proletarian, an *ouvrier*. His work is a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat.” [*Collected Works*, vol. 4, p. 41] Proudhon’s book *What is Property?* is, correctly, considered a landmark in socialist thought, as recognised even by Marx (who, after Proudhon’s death, acknowledged its importance). Proudhon’s famous maxim (“Property is theft”) is a summation of a detailed critique of property and its exploitative and oppressive nature as well as bourgeois justifications for it, a critique which is still worth reading.

So did Proudhon consider a “better future” as arriving through “prophetic denunciation of contemporary ills”? While Proudhon, like Marx, denounced the current ills of society, he did not think that this was enough. He also saw that the working class could ensure the end of capitalism. He “preach[ed] emancipation to the proletaires; association to the labourers.” [*What is Property?*, p. 137] This focus on working people as the means of ending capitalism was stressed more in *System of Economical Contradictions*:

“If you possess social science, you know that the problem of association consists in organising ... the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege ... to conduct the war to a successful conclusion, ... it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.” [pp. 397–8]

This was required because the state was an instrument of class rule, which “finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat.” [Proudhon, *Op. Cit.*, p. 399] Given this, Proudhon stressed throughout the 1848 revolution that “the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government.” [quoted by George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography*, p. 125] Unsurprisingly, he pointed to the workers associations being created as not only confirmation of his own socialist ideas but also as examples to be followed and generalised. He also argued the importance of analysing the contradictions in, and developments within, capitalism in order to create a socialism rooted in reality rather than in utopian visions. This was the base of his critique of utopian socialism in *System of Economic Contradictions*. In short, Proudhon’s actual position was the exact opposite of what it actually was — if he had read Proudhon rather than Marx’s writings on the Frenchman he would have known that. But that, I fear, would be asking too much!

While Proudhon was not a revolutionary, it cannot be said he “hoped to lead European society to a better future through a kind of prophetic denunciation of contemporary ills.” Rather, he

combined what he considered as a scientific analysis of current problems with a solution to them based on working class self-organisation and action. Bakunin took Proudhon's stress on working class self-organisation and applied it to revolutionary politics.

After subjecting Proudhon to the standard Marxist distortion of his position, Proyect argues:

“Marx eventually came to the conclusion that a critique of capitalism had to be rooted in political economy rather than ethics. Written in 1846–47, *The Poverty of Philosophy* is not only an answer to Proudhon's *Property is Theft*, it also contains some of the basic economic insights that would be more fully developed in *Capital*.”

Actually, Marx's work was “an answer” to Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions* and what Marx viewed as the limitations of Proudhon post-*What is Property?* (which he considered Proudhon's best work). It must also be stressed that Marx's book is riddled with selective quoting, tampered quotes and, a lot of the time, pure invention — in short, it provides the template of almost all subsequent Marxist attacks on anarchism. As a good Marxist, Proyect would not know this as reading Proudhon would never cross his mind. Moreover, Marx was not alone in seeking to root his “critique of capitalism” in “political economy” (nor in the contradictions and developments within capitalism). This was also Proudhon's aim (indeed, long before Marx, Proudhon called his ideas “scientific socialism”) and he argued against the abstract utopian socialist schemes associated with Fourier and Owen. Marx created his **critique** of political economy by building upon previous socialist works, including Proudhon (who stated, with characteristic modesty, that “what Marx's book really means is that he is sorry that everywhere *I* have thought the way *he* does, and said so before he did. Any determined reader can see that it is Marx who, having read me, regrets thinking like me. What a man!” [quoted by Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, p. 211]).

And what are we to make of the idea that “a critique of capitalism” has to “be rooted in [a critique of] political economy rather than ethics.” No anarchist would deny the importance of understanding how an exploitative and oppressive system works, in analysing it in order to better overthrow it. After all, anarchists do critique the capitalist system and do so explicitly to aid its destruction. However, most anarchists combine scientific analysis with an ethical commitment and vision. The idea that removing your heart makes you a better revolutionary is nonsense. It simply turns you into the mirror image of the system which you are opposed to. Ultimately, Proyect is urging us to become as one-sided as the system we are trying to change.

Proyect argues:

“Lacking an analysis of the laws of capitalist accumulation, any attempt to develop a new revolutionary movement would be open to the inconsistencies and moralising that characterise Proudhon's socialism, Bakunin included.”

It cannot be said that Marx is without his inconsistencies. After all, it seems that each Marxist sect has its own (correct!) interpretation of Marx. The multitude of debates on Marx's “political economy” is legendary (the most basic, and least often voiced, one being whether it is a “critique of political economy” or just “political economy,” personally I'll side with Marx over Proyect on this issue!). Politically, there is the question of what Marx meant by “the dictatorship of the proletariat” — is it the decentralised federal, bottom-up vision of the (Proudhon influenced) Paris

Commune or the centralised, top-down vision of the 1850 “Address to the Communist League” and the vision of “socialist” governments coming to power?

As such, inconsistencies are to be expected in any writer and individual’s interpretations of their work. The aim of revolutionary theory is to transcend previous writers, take what is useful and build upon it. This is as applicable to Marx as it is to Proudhon and Bakunin. The idea that Marx built a “consistent” ideology which we must constantly refer to and squeeze new experiences and insights into is one which would have been foreign to Marx. Sadly, many of his self-proclaimed followers do not seem to share that perspective.

Equally, while no anarchist would deny the importance of analysing and understanding the way the current economy works, we recognise that a truly revolutionary theory must be based on an analysis of all aspects of society – the state, hierarchy, sexism, racism and so on. To focus on just one aspect of modern life impoverishes theory and a revolutionary movement. And, more importantly, theory must be organically linked to practice and be rooted in the movement as a whole.

As such, to claim that only by understanding the laws of capitalist accumulation can a new revolutionary movement be created is limited. Never mind the boring work of organising unions and fighting the class war. No, that will not produce a revolutionary movement. Only by sitting in the British Museum and studying hard can we do that! Proyect’s argument explains so much. Clearly the reason why the Paris Commune failed was simply because the Communards had not studied Capital well enough (and given that volumes two and three came out after Marx’s death in 1883, they were doomed to begin with). Equally, Zapata obviously failed because he had not read “Capital” in all three volumes (he should have went to the library more!). It also explains why no successful socialist revolution has occurred, after all, only Marx fully understood his own theory and since he died in 1883 we are left with various “inconsistent” interpretations of his work.

My sarcasm does raise a serious and important point. Most people have to work in order to survive under capitalism and so cannot give the time required for the extensive study Marx conducted. This, by necessity, leaves the “new revolutionary [sic!] movement” in the hands of the “revolutionary” intelligentsia, who would inject “revolutionary” theory into a working class incapable of developing itself by its own efforts. This, of course, was considered the orthodox Marxist position for decades. Lenin took it over from Kautsky and it became the basis, as Bakunin feared, for the rule by party leaders over the masses (who are subject to “inconsistencies” until the “iron” and “scientific” leaders). As noted above, if the party is “advanced” then everyone else is “backward” and so we have the basis for the kind of party dictatorship practised and justified by the Bolsheviks.

In the words of Lenin:

“the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot direct exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of

the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.” [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

Thus, Project’s argument is the basis for party power, not workers power. It also has another, equally terrible, side effect. This is the identification of progress with “accumulation.” The bigger the means of production, the better. This meant that “socialist” accumulation could be justified and implemented upon the workers. In addition, it meant identifying socialism with capitalism. Rather than seeing the socialism as being built from below, based on the organisations created by working class people in the class struggle, “socialism” is seen as being a product of capitalist development. Thus the framework of a “socialist” economy would be the structures built as a result of capitalist accumulation. As Lenin put it, socialism “is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly **made to benefit the whole people**; by this token it **ceases** to be capitalist monopoly.” [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 37] Of course, capitalism has developed to concentrate power in a few hands and so cannot be “made to benefit the whole people.” As Bolshevik Russia showed, it was only the representatives of “the whole people” who benefited.

As such, the focus on “capital accumulation” has drawn revolutionary politics into a dead-end, a dead-end which resulted in many dead workers.

I must stress that Anarchists (like Bakunin) do not draw the elitist conclusions which Kautsky and Lenin derived from the fact that workers often have little time to study. We stress the importance of working class life and struggle in generating socialist ideas. A process of self-education and self-liberation through struggle (i.e. self-activity). In the words of Bakunin:

“the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary thought among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers’ world ... is left with but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** ... It means workers’ solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trade-unions, organisation** ... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one.” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 102–3]

Thus revolutionary theory is developed as part of the class struggle, not separately from it. The critique of capitalism is a product of working class experience and struggle, not abstractly studying “the laws of capitalist accumulation.”

Proyekt returns to Bakunin:

“First and foremost, Bakunin’s ideology is Hegelianism in reverse. Where Hegel tends to put a plus on German politics and society, Bakunin puts a minus. Instead of looking to the Prussian Junkers state as the embodiment of the impulse to freedom and self-actualisation, Bakunin looks to another nationality to lead humanity forward, namely the Slavs.”

We wonder where Proyekt got this nonsense from. After all, Bakunin spent a lot of time and effort encouraging revolution in Italy, France and Spain. He did not place the Slav’s in a privileged position as regards the revolution. He was, of course, extremely critical of the Germans (just as Marx and Engels were extremely critical of the Slavs) but this does not equate to considering the Slavs as the leadership of the world revolution. As he put it, “a social revolution cannot be a revolution of one nation alone. It is by nature an international revolution ... the Slavic proletariat must enter the International Working Men’s Association en mass.” [*Statism and Anarchy*, p. 49] At best, it could be said that as Bakunin was Russian, he was concerned with the fate of his fellow Russians. He did not, however, think that the Slavs would be saviour of humanity.

Proyekt continues:

“Although you can find this theme throughout Bakunin’s writings, its most concentrated form appears in *Statism and Anarchy*, an uncompleted book representing his most mature thinking, to put it generously. On nearly every page, you find stereotypes about Germans and Slavs. The former have ‘a passion for state order and state discipline’ because of ‘German blood, German instinct, and German tradition,’ while the latter ‘lack this passion.’ (*Statism and Anarchy*, p. 45)”

It seems strange that Proyekt does not mention Marx and Engels stereotyping of peoples (such as Jews) and their (let us say) “unenlightened” viewpoint on Blacks and others. Perhaps he does not know about them, as one Marxist notes “the disposition to idolise the founders of Marxism” has been common in Marxist circles, with their followers “erasing entirely, not only all expressions they regarded as vulgar and all references to comparatively trivial personal matters that would have shown the two men in a less than wholly favourable light, but also a large number of politically and ideologically embarrassing statements they had made privately to each other and to third parties.” (Peter Fryer, “Engels: A Man of his Time”, *The Condition of Britian*, John Lea and Geoff Pilling (eds.)). For anyone interested in the flaws of Marx and Engels can consult Fryer’s essay as I don’t think its relevant to comment on it (bar to note that Marx and Engels identification of civilisation with Ango-Saxon culture allowed them to justify “progressive” imperialism).

Should we generalise from this and dismiss the whole of Marx and Engels work? If we take Proyekt’s analysis of Bakunin seriously, the answer has to be yes. So goodbye Bakunin, Marx, Engels, Rousseau and all the other thinkers who expressed prejudiced which contradicted their politics!

I must also note that Bakunin’s prejudices, like Marx and Engels’, did not influence his internationalism. On the same page as Proyekt quotes, we discover Bakunin arguing that the Slavs “can only liberate themselves ... only by summoning them [the Germans] to universal liberty and universal brotherhood on the ruins of all existing states. But states do not topple of their own

accord; they can only be toppled by a multi-national, multi-racial, world-wide social revolution.” A few pages on, Bakunin argues that “liberation of the proletariat is absolutely impossible within the framework of any state ... That is possible, however, only through concerted action by the proletariat of all countries whose organisation first on the economic basis is precisely the object of the International Working Men’s Association ... We would have been the first to urge the Slavs to form an alliance with them [the Austrian workers] having as its objective the destruction of the state, the people’s prison.” As such, Bakunin’s “stereotyping” of the Germans did not affect his desire for world socialism.

Ignoring the fact that Marx and Engels, like Bakunin, was flawed, Proyect continues:

“Furthermore, as if referring to a thoroughbred horse, Bakunin refers to Czech peasants as representing ‘one of the most splendid Slavic types.’ ‘Hussite blood flows in their veins, the hot blood of the Taborites, and the memory of Zizka lives within them.’ Since the Hussite rebellion took place in the 15th century, the Czechs must have a very long memory.”

Obviously our Marxist has never heard of folk talks, oral history and other means by which people pass their experiences through the generations. This is unsurprising, as we have seen how little weight Proyect gives to actual experience and knowledge generated in social struggle.

Proyect then moves onto what he considers firmer ground:

“Lacking even the rudiments of an understanding of the contradictions of the capitalist system, Bakunin can of course not detect changes taking place beneath the surface.”

Given that Bakunin had read and agreed with Marx’s analysis continued in *Capital*, we can only surmise that if Bakunin was “lacking” in this, then Marx is partly to blame in making his book difficult to read! Or, then again, can Bakunin be blamed because volumes two and three of *Capital* came out twenty years after his death? Also, I’m sure Bakunin would have loved to spend the 1850s in London, studying the contradictions of the capitalist system in the British Library, but sadly he was in a Tsarist prison.

However, this is beside the point. If you do read Bakunin’s works, you will discover that he did have a firm grasp of the contradictions of the capitalist system and a clear awareness of the forces which will end it (i.e. the proletariat and peasantry). Moreover, Bakunin always stressed the economy cannot explain everything that occurs in society. Culture, politics, class struggle and so on all have an impact on social development and revolutionary movements. This perspective, it should be noted, has been taken over by more sophisticated Marxists seeking an escape from the dead-end of the more mechanistic forms of historical materialism that have existed.

After showing his ignorance of Bakunin’s work, Proyect writes:

“There is virtually no attempt to analyse German society as a product of class contradictions. Bakunin regards the workers ‘as confused by their leaders – politicians, literati and Jews,’ even though, as he admits, ‘scarcely a month or a week goes by without a street disturbance or sometimes even a clash with the police in some German city.’ Bakunin can scarcely keep his frustration under wraps as he rails at working-class willingness to vote for socialists rather than just going out and

making a gosh-darned revolution. If he Bakunin understands how evil the system is, why can't they?"

Looking at Proyect's comments we are struck by its strangeness (and not only in comparing his summary with what Bakunin actually wrote!). After all, the history of the labour movement is full of examples of leaders betraying their followers (part of the reason why anarchists reject institutionalised leaderships). Equally, such Marxists as Trotsky stressed that the key problem facing the working class was, precisely, the problem of leadership (as he put it, "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership"). As such, Proyect's comments seem contradictory, accusing Bakunin for the faults associated with a specific form of "Marxism."

What about Proyect's general point? Rather than express "frustration," Bakunin's comments are mere reporting of the facts. The fact that workers continue to vote socialist (or Democrat or even Republican!) rather than take revolutionary direct action can be considered annoying. That explains why Bakunin spent so much time arguing that the labour movement should be based on militant direct action organised on an economic basis (what would latter become revolutionary syndicalism). He spent a lot of time arguing for a real alternative to electioneering, so showing how Bakunin understood the need to win the working class movement over to the ideas of anarchism, direct action, solidarity and revolutionary self-organisation from below. As such, Proyect paints a radically false picture of Bakunin, failing to note his extensive activities within the First International and writings for the workers press explaining his ideas.

Of course, Proyect does not quote the more important comments from Bakunin from the page in question, namely that "so-called legal and peaceful agitation ... usually has its result the election to the German parliament of one or two workers (or even bourgeois scribblers) from the Social Democratic Party. Not only is this not dangerous, it is a highly useful to the German state as a lightning-rod, or a safety-value." Marxism, Bakunin argued, "inexorably enmeshes and entangles its adherents, under the pretext of political tactics, in endless accommodation with governments and the various bourgeois political parties – that is, it thrusts them directly into reaction." [*Statism and Anarchy*, p. 193 and pp. 179–80] This is understandable, as the actual history of social democracy and bourgeois democracy confirms Bakunin's comments. As Lloyd George, the last liberal PM of Britain commented during the syndicalist revolt, parliamentary socialists were "the best policeman for the Syndicalist." Electing socialists did not produce socialism, rather it has helped capitalism keep going and, as a necessary part of this, undermined effective mass struggle and direct action in favour of actions by a few leaders in bourgeois institutions.

Little wonder Proyect ignores the wheat in favour of misrepresenting the chaff.

Proyect reaches new depths by arguing:

"While reformism was certainly a problem in the German social democracy, one might doubt whether Bakunin's petulant outbursts would have had much affect. Mostly what they boil down to is an appeal to workers to abandon their trade unions and parties, an appeal heard from the ruling class that was mixed with a generous dose of repression."

It is, of course, significant that Proyect provides no examples of these appeals by Bakunin to workers to abandon "their trade unions." This is because none exist. In fact, Bakunin constantly

stressed that workers should form trade unions and that these would be the means to achieve socialism. For example, to quote from a work Proyect claims to have read (namely *Statism and Anarchy*) we find Bakunin arguing that

“the Slavic proletariat ... must enter the International en mass, form factory, artisan, and agrarian sections ... Within the International ... the Slavic workers can and should meet fraternally with the German workers ... That is the sole path to the liberation of the Slavs.” He stressed that the Slav section of the International should recognise “only the full solidarity of individuals, sections and federations in the economic struggle of the workers of all countries against their exploiters. It will seek particularly to draw the Slavic workers into all the practical consequences of this struggle.” [p. 51 and p. 220]

Elsewhere, Bakunin argued that “the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association. From the moment that every occupation — including the various agricultural trades — is represented within the International, its organisation, the organisation of the masses of the people, will be complete. “ [The *Basic Bakunin*, p. 139] Even Marx knew this. In his words, Bakunin thought that the “working class ... must only organise themselves by trades-unions.” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 48]

That Proyect can write such nonsense simply shows that he has no concern for the truth. After lying about Bakunin’s ideas, Proyect continues:

“Bakunin’s fixation with ‘blood’ and ‘instinct’ appears elsewhere. You can frequently detect an element of 19th-century Social Darwinism, even though Bakunin tends not to cite anybody like Herbert Spencer.”

Fascinating. Truly fascinating. Proyect obviously is an astute critic, after all no other commentator has noticed this element of “Social Darwinism” in Bakunin before! It should be noted that “Social Darwinism” celebrates individualism, inequality, hierarchy, competition and so on, all positions Bakunin explicitly opposed and argued against! Little wonder other commentators missed this “element” of Social Darwinism! Bakunin, the devious man that he was, hid it beneath the opposite opinions! Luckily we have Proyect to delve “beneath the surface” for us!

Equally, the comments on “blood” and “instinct” is used, I am sure, by Louis to imply some sort of link between Bakunin and Nazism. The attempt to associate the enemy (no matter who) with fascism is a sadly common approach from Marxists. Could this be because so many of the leading lights of Fascism in Italy originally considered themselves Marxists? Or is it guilt for the fact that in 1923 the German Communist Party undertook the brief “Schlageter turn” of several months during which it worked with the Nazis in a campaign against the Versailles Treaty? No matter what the reason, this sort of “history by hindsight” is hardly convincing.

So what is the evidence for these “elements” of “Social Darwinism”? Proyect enlightens us:

“In the most bizarre expression of this, he tries to explain patriotism as being rooted in biology.” After quoting Bakunin from *Open Letters to Swiss Comrades*, Proyect opines: “Of course, this is complete nonsense. If anything, patriotism is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history, very much associated with the rise of the

nation-state. Since Bakunin lacks an analysis of the origin of the state, it should come as no surprise that he confuses it with the garden.”

It is easy to refute Proyect, we simply have to read the essay in question. Once we do, we discover that Proyect is totally distorting Bakunin’s ideas. The quote Proyect decides to quote is from Bakunin’s discussion of the first of four elements of patriotism, namely the “natural or physiological element” as opposed to “the economic element,” the “political element” and the “religious or fanatical element.” The “natural” element, which Bakunin calls “the basis of all naive, instinctive and brutish patriotism,” is the “automatic and wholly uncritical, instinctive attachment for hereditary or traditional ways of life which are collectively accepted” and “a particular combination of collective habits ... developed by tradition or by history.” In other words, by “natural patriotism” Bakunin meant custom, attachment to a specific culture, way of life, and area and **not** nationalism (i.e. love of the nation-state). I wonder if Proyect will deny that people feel attachment to where they grow up, their culture and so on? That nationalism plays on, and distorts, these nature feelings does not mean they do not exist. Indeed, Bakunin notes the “natural element” of patriotism was a “natural feeling, being in essence and in reality an altogether basically local feeling, is a serious obstacle to the formation of States” which can only “establish themselves only by destroying ... this animal passion.”

Proyect and Bakunin are talking about different things — as Proyect is undoubtedly aware.

As regards “political patriotism,” Bakunin dismisses it as “the solidaristic interest” of the “privileged class” in charge of the state. It is a “theology of the State,” created to ensure that the masses accept their oppression. The state itself was created to defend “a real collective body ... a privileged body” in its exploitation of the “great masses of the people,” namely “the governing and property-owning class.” [p. 177] In other words, Bakunin sees the state as being the means by which an exploiting minority defends itself against the masses and so the origin of the state is in inequality. The similarities with Marx are obvious, so if Bakunin “lacks an analysis of the origin of the state” then so does Proyect!

Proyect either seeks to deceive (by deliberately distorting Bakunin’s ideas) or is simply ignorant (by skimming Bakunin’s works for quotes rather than trying to understand what he is saying).

After distorting Bakunin’s ideas, Proyect argues:

“One would be at a loss to determine where Bakunin came up with such hare-brained notions.”

That is easy to determine, as they are from Proyect’s own mind!

Proyect continues:

“Since there are never any scholarly citations in his work, one must assume that he was simply reflecting commonplace ideas floating around in the European middle-class of his age. One imagines that he was too busy fomenting insurrections to find time to go to a library.”

Given that later in his inventions, Proyect implies that Bakunin had “been sitting around in the sewers hatching conspiracies by candlelight” I have to wonder if that is where Proyect thinks he found these “middle-class” ideas? Equally, being a Russian ex-aristocrat he would have been

given the best education available, I am sure — except, of course, he would have missed a few classes when he was in solidarity confinement in the 1850s — and Bakunin always stressed the importance of education.

So Proyect's lesson to all the radicals out there is simple: Get ye to a library (preferably, the "political economy" section!) or Louis Proyect will distort your arguments!

Simply put, the quality of a writer or their work is not dependent on "scholarly citations," as Proyect himself proves. Proyect's selective use of them simply allows the reader to discover how inaccurate his arguments are. I would, of course, stress the importance of study and education. After all, it was by going to my own library that I found the books I needed to refute Proyect's pathetic essay.

Proyect, after urging us all to read more, states:

"Then again, perhaps Bakunin would have not gotten much use out of a library given anti-intellectual prejudices such as these:

'By contrast to all metaphysicians, positivists, and scholarly or unscholarly worshippers of the goddess science, we maintain that natural and social life always precedes thought (which is merely one of its functions) but is never its result. Life develops out of its own inexhaustible depths by means of a succession of diverse facts, not a succession of abstract reflections; the latter, always produced by life but never producing it, like milestones merely indicate its direction and the different phases of its spontaneous and self-generated development.' (Statism and Anarchy, p. 135)

"Allowing that this formula has a certain kind of raffish 1960s charm, it is practically useless as a guide for the intelligent pursuit of science. To state that social life precedes thought is a truism. But how exactly do we develop a method that can make sense out of the natural world and society? That is the real question. By all evidence of Bakunin's work, there is no indication that such a method was of any interest to him. Rather you find vulgar opinionating worthless to anybody trying to make sense of European society of the mid-19th century, let alone the world we live in today."

Ignoring his obvious hatred for the 1960s, I can safely say that (yet again!) Proyect misses the point. Bakunin is arguing against the idea that a few "enlightened" people can force society into a grand scheme of their own invention. Rather, society (and so socialism) must be created by the working class by their own actions, organisations and needs. As Bakunin puts it (immediately after the section Proyect quotes):

"In keeping with this conviction, we have neither the intention nor the least desire to impose on our own people or on any other an ideal social organisation that we have drawn from books or thought up on our own. In the belief that the masses bear all the elements of their future organisational forms in their own more or less historically evolved instincts, in their everyday needs and their conscious and unconscious desires, we seek that ideal within the people themselves. Since every state power ... by its nature and by its position stands outside the people and above them, and must

invariably try to subject them to rules and objectives alien to them, we declare ourselves the enemies of ... every state power... We believe that the people can only be happy and free when they create their own life, organising themselves from below upwards by means of independent and completely free associations.” [pp. 135–6]

Clearly, Proyect simply distorts Bakunin’s position. Equally, does Proyect seek to “develop a method that can make sense out of the natural world and society” which is not rooted in working class self-activity and autonomy? Is socialism created from below or imposed from above. Is socialism generated from working class life and struggle or introduced from outside by bourgeois intellectuals (i.e. can you become a socialist by taking part in the class struggle or by just sitting in the library)? These are the real questions. Little wonder Proyect distorts Bakunin!

Equally, when Proyect states that “by all evidence of Bakunin’s work, there is no indication that such a method was of any interest to him.” Looking at page 135, we find Bakunin arguing, in stark contrast to Proyect’s claims of “anti-intellectualism,” that “we revolutionary anarchists are proponents of universal popular education” and that “general scientific education will become common property, particularly a familiarity with scientific method as a way of thinking, that is, of generalising facts and drawing more or less correct conclusions from them.” This, I must stress again, is on page 135 of *Statism and Anarchy*, the very page Proyect quotes from! So, just to state the obvious, Bakunin is arguing that the radical movement should be based on the scientific method, namely the generalising of facts and the generating of conclusions from those facts. Now, if Proyect disagrees with this, the standard scientific methodology, then he should say so rather than state, in brazen disregard for the facts, that Bakunin had no interest in such a method (perhaps the fact that Proyect ignores this methodology with regards to Bakunin suggests that this is the case?).

Simply put, Proyect is lying about Bakunin’s ideas. Maybe he has the only copy of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy* out the library and so thinks himself safe from people checking his quotes? Who knows, but he clearly has as little regard for his readers as he does for the truth.

Proyect moves on:

“One of the key differences between Bakunin and Marx is over what we might call ‘agency,’ a term designating the social class capable of transforming society through revolutionary action. Despite the fact that the industrial proletariat had not achieved the sort of numerical strength and social power that it would later in the century, Marx staked everything on this emerging class.”

In other words, Marx staked everything on a class which was not the majority of the population. Thus, when he argued for the “dictatorship of the proletariat” he was implicitly arguing for minority rule. Bear this in mind, as this issue will shortly return.

Proyect:

“The reasons for this are developed extensively throughout his writings, but suffice it to say at this point that it is related to his analysis of the capitalist economy. Since the capitalist system can only survive through competition and revolutionising the means of production, it would of necessity introduce machinery and — hence — a proletariat.”

Actually, it is **not** machinery which creates a proletariat. The proletariat existed before machinery was introduced. Just to remind Proyect of what he should know already, the proletariat is a class which does not own the means of production and has nothing to sell but its labour. As Marx discusses in *Capital*, the necessary prerequisite for industrial capitalism was the expropriation of the peasantry by means of “primitive accumulation.” Industry came latter, proletarianisation came first (indeed, Marx notes that machinery was used explicitly as a weapon in the class struggle). Obviously its not just Bakunin Proyect is ignorant of!

He continues:

“In struggles over wages and working conditions — as well as a host of ancillary issues — the two classes will confront each other in revolutionary battles for power. While the post-WWII era left much of this in doubt, we are witnessing a return to the ‘classic’ norms of the 19th century, as modern capitalism does everything in its power to destroy the welfare state and the trade unions.”

Ah, yes, working class people are just interested in economic issues. Yet more shades of Lenin! For Proyect, socialism appears as a simple biological reflex. Sadly, this has never been the case. While economic issues are important, so are political, cultural and other aspects of life. The struggle against oppression (hierarchy) is an important aspect of the class struggle. It is a shame that Proyect is trying to push activism back into the narrow economist boundaries which the 1960s helped to shatter.

Proyect argues:

“Although Bakunin was no friend of the bourgeoisie, he never seemed to be able to make up his mind on the ‘agency’ question.”

Actually, he did. Bakunin argued that anarchists saw “the new social order” being “attained ... through the social (and therefore anti-political) organisation and power of the working masses of the cities and villages.” He argued that “only the trade union sections can give their members ... practical education and consequently only they can draw into the organisation of the International the masses of the proletariat, those masses without whose practical co-operation ... the Social Revolution will never be able to triumph.” The International, in Bakunin’s words, “organises the working masses ... from the bottom up” and that this was “the proper aim of the organisation of trade union sections.” He stressed that revolutionaries must “[o]rganise the city proletariat in the name of revolutionary Socialism ... [and] unite it into one preparatory organisation together with the peasantry.” However, “in order that the peasants rise in rebellion, it is absolutely necessary that the city workers take upon themselves the initiative in this revolutionary movement.” [*The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, p. 300, p. 310, p. 319, p. 378 and p. 204] I could go on (I have elsewhere) but I won’t — for anyone who has read Bakunin these facts are too obvious.

Thus, for Bakunin, the “working masses” (the proletariat, artisans and peasantry) would be the agent of social change, with the city workers taking the led. This would constitute the majority of the population, rather than Marx’s fixation on what was then a small minority of the working population.

Proyect, ignoring the facts, continues:

“Addressing Marx’s belief that the proletariat be ‘raised to the level of a ruling class,’ Bakunin pointed out that some other class, like the ‘peasant rabble,’ might end up under the working-class boot. This concern is obviously related to Bakunin’s preference for the warm-hearted Slavic peasant over the anal-retentive, authority-worshipping German worker: ‘If we look at the question from the national point of view, then, presumably, as far as the Germans are concerned it is the Slavs who will occupy in regard to the victorious German proletariat that the latter now occupies in relation to its own bourgeoisie.’

“Absent from Bakunin’s discussion is the economic and social weight of the working class, which could counter that of the ruling class. Furthermore, the peasant was far too differentiated socially to rule in its own name. Lacking any specific analysis of the agrarian question, Bakunin was content to dwell in fantasies about the uncorrupted peasant. (*Statism and Anarchy*, p. 177)”

Just in case you fail to notice, Proyect is actually proving Bakunin’s point! Proyect states that “the peasant was far too differentiated socially to rule in its own name.” So who is to rule over it? Clearly the proletariat. Proyect shows Bakunin was right! What a “critique”!

It should be noted that when Bakunin wrote *Statism and Anarchy*, the proletariat was only a minority of the working class in all European countries bar Britain (as Marx himself acknowledged at the same time).

As such, rather than Bakunin ignoring the “economic and social weight of the working class,” it is in fact Proyect who does this. Let me stress this — Proyect is arguing for dictatorship by a minority class and is, ironically enough, confirming this aspect of Bakunin’s critique of Marxism. Thank you, Louis!

Equally, to fail to discuss Engels opinions on the Slavs in 1849 is to distort Bakunin’s arguments (and its sources). Engels argued in 1849 (in reply to Bakunin) that the “stubborn Czechs and the Slovaks should be grateful to the Germans, who have taken the trouble to civilise them.” He warned that “only ... the most determined terrorism against these Slavic peoples” can “safeguard the revolution.” (quoted in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, p. 432). Indeed, Engels was not above seeing the positive side of genocide: “at the first victorious uprising of the French proletariat ... the Austrian Germans and Magyars will be set free and wreck a bloody revenge on the Slav barbarians. The general war which will then break out will ... wipe out all these petty hidebound nations, down to their very names ... [and this war] will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth ... of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward.”(quoted by Fryer, *Op. Cit.*). As such, Bakunin’s argument had its roots in Engels clear and repulsive anti-Slavism and has nothing to do with “fantasies about the uncorrupted peasant.”

Thus, for Proyect to state this “obviously [sic!] related to Bakunin’s preference for the ... Slavic peasant” simply misses the point. Indeed, as indicated, Proyect proves part of Bakunin’s argument.

I should also note that Proyect fails to mention the other, more important, aspect of Bakunin’s critique of Marxism, namely his argument that the “dictatorship of the proletariat” meant, in reality, the rule over the proletariat by a few Marxist leaders, a “highly despotic government of the masses by a new and very small aristocracy of real or pretended scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be liberated in entirety from the cares of government and included in entirety in the governed herd. A fine liberation!” [pp. 178–9]

Perhaps this is because his politics points him in this direction? Equally, the actual experience of Bolshevism in power confirmed, as we discuss below, Bakunin's fears.

After, ironically, proving Bakunin's point, Proyect argues:

"In what might be described as a bet-hedging strategy, Bakunin was not above making appeals to the royalty to carry out his program."

Proyect then quotes from a 1862 pamphlet by Bakunin called "The People's Cause: Romanov, Pugachev, or Pestel." That Bakunin was not an anarchist in 1862 seems to be considered irrelevant to Proyect! Perhaps we could write a critique of fascism by quoting Mussolini when he was a leading Marxist? Given Proyect's methodology, this would be a valid approach but not one that would convince many others!

Looking for more dirt on Bakunin, Proyect turns yet again to his pre-anarchist past:

"After Bakunin was imprisoned in 1851, he wrote a 'Confession' to Czar Nicholas I. This self-debasing document was not wrested out of torture, but was a ploy to win early release through flattery."

Which, of course, depends on whether you think solidarity confinement within the notorious Peter-and-Paul prison is torture or not. Since solidarity confinement is one of the key ways by which prison authorities use to break prisoners, I would suggest that Proyect is talking nonsense.

After failing to provide an accurate account of the circumstances that Bakunin faced, Proyect continues:

"It contains page after page of the most embarrassing kind of toadying up to the Russian despot, among which you can find appeals for a 'revolution from above' of the kind suggested in the 1862 pamphlet ... We should hasten to add that this is the same Czar who made Russia a living hell for peasant and Jews alike."

We should hasten to add that this is the same Tsar who had the power of life and death for Bakunin, who made his life a living hell and who ensured that he remained in prison. It also explains the tone of Bakunin's "confession": If you are trying to persuade your captor to show kindness you cannot exactly write a track urging his downfall! As it was, the Tsar (unlike Proyect) was unconvinced about the honesty of Bakunin's "confession" and left Bakunin to rot.

After attacking Bakunin for trying to end his solidarity confinement in the most notorious prison in Russia, if not the world at the time, Proyect continues:

"According to Cecil Roth, of the legal enactments concerning the Jews published in Russia from 1649 to 1881, no less than one half, or six hundred in all, belong to Nicholas the First's reign ... It is entirely likely that Bakunin's anti-Semitism prevented him from worrying much over such matters."

This does not deserve much of a reply, bar to note that Bakunin became an anarchist in 1866 and it would be relevant if Proyect's examples dated from that period. Equally, Proyect seems to forget that Bakunin had been imprisoned for 8 years due to his anti-Tsarist activities, suggesting that Bakunin was well aware of the nature of Tsar Nicholas the First (who, it should be stressed,

had thrown Bakunin into solidarity confinement for his democratic activities). Bakunin's article appealing to the Tsar to become a Tsar of the people was deliberately asking the Tsar to commit political suicide and so can only be considered a mere propaganda device. However, as I noted, this is of little interest as Bakunin was not an anarchist at the time. Clearly Proyect mentions this only to indulge in some mud-slinging.

Talking of which, since Proyect has decided to mud-sling, I'll indulge him. Looking at the fate of Jews in Russia, what is significant is "the total silence Marx and Engels seem to have observed, in private as well as in public, about the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia in the spring of 1861. While, of course, this means little, it "does suggest a significant blind spot" (along with "the stream of vituperation [of Jewish people] that runs for decades through the private correspondence of Engels and Marx"). A similar combination of public silence and private racism marks their opinions of Blacks (Fryer, Op. Cit.). Again, this just proves that Marx and Engels, like Bakunin, were men of their time. However, what is significant about their racism is the believe that certain races and cultures were more developed than others, giving them the right to "civilise" others. As well as allotting this role of "civiliser" to the Germans, Marx (in 1853) was of the opinion that "the main stock of [slave] Negroes in Jamaica always consisted of freshly imported barbarians ... [while] the present generation of Negroes in America is a native product, more or less Yankeeified, English speaking, etc., and hence **capable of being emancipated.**" [quoted by Fryer, Op. Cit.] Marx and Engels support for "progressive" imperialism in such places as India and Algeria, regardless of the human cost. Incidentally, Engels saw the possibility of "socialist" imperialism, noting "the countries inhabited by a native population ... must be taken over for the time being by the proletariat and led rapidly as possible towards independence." [Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, pp. 489-90] Obviously, only whites have a valid culture and have the duty to bring up the less fortunate in their own image.

What to make of all this? Is there any point bringing all this up? Of course not — unless you are a "Marxist" of Proyect's calibre and consider personal attacks as the equivalent of political critique.

Incidentally, it also seems for Proyect that while "the critique of capitalism" cannot be conducted in by means of "moralising," the critique of anarchism can be. After all, this is the bulk of Proyect's "critique" of anarchism via Bakunin. Bakunin was racist, he cries, and so anarchism is flawed! Modern activists do not have "commitment," by moans, they must become Marxists! Bakunin was nice to the Tsar to escape solidarity imprisonment, he is a traitor (and anarchism is flawed)!

Lastly, even taken at face value, you would have to be stupid to assume that Bakunin's racism had equal weighting with the Bolsheviks' behaviour in the league table of despicable activity (for example, the creation of a party dictatorship, the repression of strikes, free speech, independent working class organisation, the creation of a secret police force, the attack on Kronstadt, the betrayal of the Makhnovists, the violent repression of the Russian anarchist movement, etc.). It seems strange that personal bigotry is of equal, or even more, importance in evaluating a political theory than its practice during a revolution. But there you go!

Proyect continues his attacks on Bakunin:

"If this is the case, we can certainly explain it as a function of his social roots in the Russian gentry. Whether this makes him an appropriate symbol of the unquenchable struggle for freedom and social justice is another question altogether."

The idea that people should be a “symbol” and that this symbol should be a person suggests hero worship in its most crudest form. Anarchists do not seek to replace one idol with another. Replacing the Virgin Mary with Marx is not a great step forward. As such, Proyect’s attack on Bakunin can be explained — he thinks anarchists look at Bakunin like he looks at Marx. Sorry, but anarchists recognise that Bakunin was human and so subject to human failings. If Proyect feels the need for an “appropriate symbol” to personify the struggle for freedom and social question then that is his business, but you would think that after the “cult of personality” inflicted upon the world by the Soviet bureaucracy, modern day socialists would be wary of personalising ideals in people.

He continues:

“Whatever else one might think about 19th-century Enlightenment values in this postmodernist age, the commitment to the emancipation of the Jews was laudable. It is unfortunate that Bakunin’s revolt against Hegel allowed him to embrace anti-Enlightenment prejudices of the worst sort.”

To claim that Bakunin’s revolt “against Hegel” meant he embraced anti-Semitism is simply incredible! This is not only in terms of its stupidity, but also in terms of its idealism. As a Marxist, Proyect should be aware that ideas have their roots in material conditions. As such, Bakunin’s anti-Semitism (like Marx and Engels racist comments) is a product of his social background, his upbringing in a deeply anti-Semitic culture. To “explain” it in terms of a “revolt against Hegel” is just silly (I doubt he would explain Marx and Engels anti-Slav comments in terms of their “revolt against Hegel,” assuming he acknowledged their failings on this issue).

It should also be noted that Bakunin did not argue for “freedom (except for the Jews).” His anti-Semitism did not extend to opposing Jewish liberation. Not did his anti-Semitism seem to bother the large and militant Jewish anarchist movement nor such Jewish anarchists as Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman.

That Bakunin continued to show prejudices simply shows that he was not perfect, that he was human and so did not live up to all his ideals. Anarchists are not bothered about this. We do not follow individuals, but ideas. We do not seek idols nor new gods to worship. If Proyect needs his heroes to be perfect, that is his concern. However, anarchists have better things to do than create a shrine to Bakunin. We acknowledge his faults, reject those aspects of his ideas which were wrong, and then we move on, building upon the positive ideas we gather from reading his works.

Proyect continues:

“If appeals to the Czar went unheeded, there were always tightly knit and highly secretive conspiratorial circles that could be relied on. Such pure expressions of the anarchist spirit would be immune to the blandishments of bourgeois society.”

Bakunin, as is well, known, favoured secret groups. Why was this the case? A materialist approach would be to look at Bakunin’s experiences as a revolutionary, the societies lived in and the nature of state repression that existed. Proyect does not bother doing this and instead subjects us to more philosophical idealism. Simply put, usually Bakunin lived in societies in which secrecy was necessary. In the words of Murray Bookchin, “Bakunin’s emphasis on conspiracy

and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival.” [*The Spanish Anarchists*, p. 24] Proyect ignores the historical context.

He continues:

“This revolutionary priesthood understands the tasks of the oppressed far better than they ever could themselves”

And then he quotes Bakunin:

“This revolutionary alliance excludes any idea of dictatorship and of controlling and directive power. It is, however, necessary for the establishment of this revolutionary alliance and for the Triumph of the Revolution over reaction that the unity of ideas of revolutionary action find an organ in the midst of popular anarchy which will be the life and the energy of the Revolution. This organ should be the secret and universal association of the International Brothers.

“This association has its origin in the conviction that revolutions are never made by individuals or even by secret societies. They make themselves; they are produced by the force of circumstances, the movement of facts and events. They receive a long preparation in the deep, instinctive consciousness of the masses, then they burst forth, often seemingly triggered by trivial causes. All that a well-organised society can do is, first, to assist at the birth of a revolution by spreading among the masses ideas which give expression to their instincts, and to organize, not the army of the Revolution — the people alone should always be that army — but a sort of revolutionary general staff, composed of dedicated, energetic, intelligent individuals, sincere friends of the people above all, men neither vain nor ambitious, but capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the instincts of the people.”

‘There need not be a great number of these men. One hundred revolutionaries, strongly and earnestly allied, would suffice for the international organisation of all of Europe. Two or three hundred revolutionaries will be enough for the organisation of the largest country.’ (“The Program of the International Brotherhood”, 1869)

It would be churlish to note that this quote directly contradicts Proyect’s comment that “this revolutionary priesthood understands the tasks of the oppressed far better than they ever could themselves.” After all, does not Bakunin argue for the “spreading among the masses ideas which give expression to their instincts”? Elsewhere, Bakunin clarified what he meant by the role of the revolutionary organisation. The programme of the revolutionary organisation had to reflect the instincts and needs of the working population and must never be imposed on them. As he argued, the working masses were “not a blank page on which any secret society can write whatever it wishes ... It has worked out, partly consciously, probably three-quarters unconsciously, its own programme which the secret society must get to know or guess and to which it must adapt itself.” He stresses that once the state “is destroyed ... the people will rise ... for **their own** [ideal]” and anyone “who tries to foist **his own** programme on the people will be left holding the baby.” [quoted in *Daughter of a Revolutionary*, Michael Confino (ed.), p. 252, p. 254 and p. 256]

As he stresses, libertarian socialist ideas come from the masses and not from outside them:

“In opposition to ... oppressive statist orientations ... an entirely new orientation finally arose from the depths of the proletariat itself ... It proceeds directly to the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes ... and the abolition of their last buttress, the state.

“That is the program of social revolution.” [*Statism and Anarchy*, pp. 48–9]

As such, while Bakunin could be faulted in expressing himself badly in 1868, it is clear from looking at this programme in the full context of his anarchist writings that Proyect is distorting Bakunin’s ideas.

Proyect proclaims: “Even the worst caricature of Leninist vanguard would pale in comparison to this kind of elitism.”

Strange, then, that he fails to quote the following sections of the same programme, “[w]e are the natural enemies of those revolutionaries — future dictators, regimentors and custodians of revolution — who... [want] to create new revolutionary States just as centralist and despotic as those we already know ...” Nor, in point 8, that since the “revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations ... [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples.” Clearly, Bakunin is not being elitist. He did not argue that the revolutionary organisation should seize power but rather encourage working class self-management of the revolution. How is it “elitist” to argue that socialism must be built from below by the people themselves?

And talking of Leninist vanguards, why does Proyect not quote Trotsky and Lenin on this matter? After all, Trotsky argued (in 1937!) that:

“The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the ‘dictatorship’ of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.” [Trotsky, *Writings 1936–37*, pp. 513–4]

Lenin always stressed that the Bolsheviks had to take power and so equated working class power with party rule. By 1920, he was arguing that “the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks” lies in “correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of

the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers.” Note, the vanguard (the party) seizes power, **not** the masses. Indeed, he stressed that the “very presentation of the question — ‘dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?’ is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind” and “[t]o go so far ... as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid.” [*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, p. 35, p. 27 and p. 25]

The previous year he had admitted that the Bolsheviks had created a one-party dictatorship:

“we are reproached with having established a dictatorship of one party ... we say, ‘Yes, it is a dictatorship of one party! This is what we stand for and we shall not shift from that position ... ’” [*Collected Works*, vol. 29, p. 535]

This quickly became the orthodox Bolshevik position (and one which Trotsky still supported in 1937!) It would seem that Proyect’s attack on Bakunin backfires on Leninism. As would be expected.

Proyect argues:

“Nowhere is there the slightest awareness in Bakunin of the need for a working-class revolutionary leadership to emerge from its participation in the mass movement. In a revolutionary situation, workers will not rally to people who have been sitting around in the sewers hatching conspiracies by candlelight. They will gravitate to the men and women who have risked jail and beatings to win reforms that make a difference in their day-to-day lives.”

To refute Proyect’s argument it is necessary to do what he fails to do, namely to understand fully Bakunin’s ideas. Proyect simply quotes selectively and out of context to paint a false image of Bakunin’s ideas. To use an analogy, if you quote solely from Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Programme” you would also prove that Marx did not have “the slightest awareness” of the “need for a working-class revolutionary leadership to emerge from its participation in the mass movement.” As such, Proyect is simply not presenting Bakunin’s ideas honestly.

So what were Bakunin’s ideas on this matter? He was aware of the importance of anarchists getting involved in the class struggle (that was why he joined the International, after all!). As he put it:

“What policy should the International [Workers’ Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ... [*Basic Bakunin*, p. 109]

And:

“And indeed, as soon as a worker believes that the economic state of affairs can be radically transformed in the near future, he begins to fight, in association with his comrades, for the reduction of his working hours and for an increase in his salary... through practice and action ... the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeois, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes.” [Op. Cit., p. 103]

Clearly, Proyect is (yet again!) distorting Bakunin’s ideas. He was well aware of the importance of anarchists taking an active role in the class struggle. However, it should be stressed that anarchists reject the idea of an institutionalised leadership and the vision of working people being incapable of organising themselves without looking to leaders to act and think for them.

Proyect argues:

“For all of the misunderstandings about the Leninist concept of a vanguard, it is useful to refer to *What Is to be Done* for clarification” and quotes it. It is, of course, amusing for Proyect to note the “misunderstandings” associated with “the Leninist concept of a vanguard.” This is because most of the “misunderstanding” arises from Leninists trying to downplay the elitist formulations contained in Lenin’s work. Clearly, we need someone like Proyect to look “beneath the surface” and inform us what Lenin actually meant (after all, as the church knows you need priests to correctly interpret the holy scripts!).

Unsurprisingly, as with his “critique” of Bakunin, Proyect does not quote the key aspect of Lenin’s work, namely that socialism ideas are alien to the working class and have to be introduced from outside by “intellectuals.” In Lenin’s words:

“the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness ... the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.”

This meant that “Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness ... could only be brought to them [the workers] from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness.” Socialist ideas did not arise from the labour movement but from the “educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals.” [*Essential Works of Lenin*, pp. 74–5]

As such, it appears we have the usual ignoring of the wheat in favour of the chaff.

Proyect goes on:

“Despite the tendency of some modern anarchists to claim that they are following the Zapatistas’ footsteps, there is powerful evidence that this movement has much more in common with Lenin’s concept than the small conspiratorial circles favoured by Bakunin.”

Simply put, anarchism does not equal Bakunin (or, more correctly, the narrow and distorted vision of Bakunin which inhabits many Marxist minds). As regards “Lenin’s concept,” it is obvious that the Zapatista’s are not following it at all. The Zapatista’s have rejected key concepts of Lenin’s ideas (such as the vanguard seizing power) and have embraced the vision of revolution from below upwards found in Bakunin. But, of course, the Zapatista’s are not anarchists or “Marxists” – they are Zapatista’s and while many of their ideas are close (even identical) to anarchism we anarchists don’t feel the need to squeeze them into labels they themselves do not use.

He continues:

“In many respects, their descent on Mexico City in March 2001, culminating in one of the largest ‘anti-globalizations’ actions to date, was designed to win support for legislation that would improve the material, cultural and political conditions of Mayan Indians.”

It should be noted that direct action used to gain reforms, including political reforms, is something anarchists support wholeheartedly.

Project:

“In an article in the March 25 Los Angeles Times , Subcommandante Marcos is reported to have ‘slammed the failures of revolutionary movements of past decades for not standing up for the rights of indigenous peoples and other disenfranchised groups, including homosexuals.’ In reality, this has been the task of the socialist movement from the days of Marx and Lenin. If particular socialist groups have been inattentive to these sorts of issues, it is to be blamed on What is to be Done, which calls for involvement in ‘every sphere and in every question of social and political life.’”

Ah, yes, if specific Christians fail to act as Christians, then it is their fault for not interpreting the holy scriptures correctly! Equally, even a quick glance at the opinions of Marx and Engels showed that they had little regard for the “rights of indigenous peoples and other disenfranchised groups” (as regards homosexuals, “the barbarism of ‘homophobia might have been coined to describe Engels’s backward and intolerant views on homosexuality.” (Fryer, Op. Cit.)). Their support for “progressive” imperialism applied to Mexico as well, with Engels commenting that it was good that the “energetic Yankees” had taken California from “the lazy Mexicans” in order to ensure its “rapid exploitation.” (quoted by Fryer, Op. Cit.) It is doubtful that either Marx and Engels would have viewed the Zapatista’s revolt against capitalist “progress” as anything less than reactionary. As for Lenin, well, he was quite happy to repress the working class and peasantry “disenfranchised” by the Bolshevik dictatorship during the Russian Revolution. I’m sure, however, he would have happily used the struggle of the Zapatistas as a means for his “vanguard” to seize power, but that is another issue.

Project tries to generalise:

“In reality, the biggest question dividing anarchists and Marxists is not the theory of the state. It is rather the value of political action, including action designed to win reforms of the kind that would improve the lives of Mayan Indians, for example.”

Proyect, of course, is simply slandering anarchism here. This is for two reasons. As noted above, anarchists are not opposed for fighting for reforms, no matter what Proyect states. Equally, anarchists are not opposed to “political action” as such. We use the term “political action” to refer to the standing of candidates in bourgeois elections. As Bakunin argued, “the International does not reject politics of a general kind; it will be compelled to intervene in politics so long as it is forced to struggle against the bourgeoisie. It rejects only bourgeois politics.” [*The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, p. 313] Mass protests and direct action used to force the state to pass reforms is a key aspect of anarchist theory and practice. Rather than electing a few leaders to fight for us, anarchists argue for working class people to fight for reforms by their own direct action and organisations. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

“[T]he Anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power, for in history economic exploitation has always gone hand in hand with political and social oppression. The exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other.” [*Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 15]

Such a unification must take place on the social and economic field, not the political, as that is where the working class is strongest. In other words anarchists “are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle... must take the form of direct action... It would... be absurd for them [the working class] to overlook the importance of the political struggle. Every event that affects the live of the community is of a political nature. In this sense every important economic action... is also a political action and, moreover, one of incomparably greater importance than any parliamentary proceeding.” [Rudolf Rocker, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 65–66]

As such, the Zapatista’s are showing the value of direct action rather than “political action.” Proyect shows his ignorance of his subject matter again:

“If you turn to August Nimitz’s Summer 1999 article in *Science and Society* titled ‘Marx and Engels — Unsung Heroes of the Democratic Breakthrough,’ you will discover how engaged they were in struggles against despotism. Rather than philosophising about future utopias, they committed themselves to fighting alongside working-class organisations on the front lines.”

In 1848, Bakunin took part in the uprisings against absolutism in many towns. He fought on the barricades, “on the front lines.” He was arrested and was sentenced to death in two countries for his pains. These sentences were not carried out and instead Bakunin was sent in chains to the Tsar, who placed him in solidarity confinement in the Peter and Paul prison. After spending 8 years there, he was finally exiled to Siberia and from there escaped to the West. Once there, Bakunin again got involved in democratic politics and slowly became an anarchist. As part of this process he became an anarchist, joined the IWMA (a working class organisation) and aided numerous strikes in Switzerland. Does this sound like someone who simply “philosophis[ed] about future utopias”? Or someone who ignored working class struggle and organisation?

Clearly, struggling against despotism “on the front lines” was something Bakunin shared with Marx and Engels.

Proyect argues:

“While the goal of these organisations was to replace feudal absolutism with political democracy, the logic of the struggle was toward social and economic democracy as well. This was the original meaning of democracy: rule by the people (demos).”

But in “political democracy” the people do not rule. Rather, they elect a handful of politicians to rule for them. As Bakunin argued:

“What does it mean, ‘the proletariat raised to a governing class?’ Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 million be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one would be ruled. Then there will be no government, there will be no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves.

“In the Marxists’ theory this dilemma is resolved in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage – the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school – is a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will.

“So ... it always comes down to the same dismal result: government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers’ world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people...” [*Statism and Anarchy*, p. 178]

The fact is that Marx and Engels thought about “political power” and “political action” in decidedly bourgeois senses. For example, in 1852 Marx was arguing that “Universal Suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population ... Its inevitable result, here, is **the political supremacy of the working class.**” [*Collected Works*, vol. 11, pp. 335–6] They split the First International over the issue of participating in elections (Bakunin argued that each section should develop its own political strategy while practising economic solidarity). While correctly arguing in places that mass direct action was “political,” Marx’s identification of “political power” with electing a government and his tendency to associate “political action” with electioneering hamstrung the socialist movement for decades and pushed it into the dead-end of Social Democracy (and its radical offspring, Bolshevism).

Applying this model to social and economic issues would not be a great step forward. This is a major difference between anarchism and Marxism. For anarchists, (bourgeois) democracy does not and cannot mean working class power or management of society. Rather, it is based on delegating power into the hands of a few leaders. Instead of this form of democracy, anarchists argue for self-management. This means decision making by mass assemblies and the election of clearly mandated and recallable delegates. In the words of Bakunin:

“[T]he federated Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times... An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set ... [and] to reorganise along revolutionary lines ... and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of those deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... Thus it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the ... Revolution, founded upon ... the ruins of States, will emerge triumphant...

“Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... being organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation ...” [No God, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 155–6]

And:

“Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so-called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction.” [Op. Cit., p. 160]

As such, anarchists reject Project’s vision as being deeply undemocratic and one which the “anti-globalisation” movement rejects. For example, Carlo Giuliani’s father argued that “Carlo didn’t accept the notion that eight leaders of the world should decide the life and death of hundreds of thousands of people.” Very true. Let us see if the Bolshevik method of organising is an improvement. Looking at Lenin’s *Left-wing Communism* we discover the following comments:

“The Party, which holds annual congresses ... , is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress... Not a single important political decision is decided by any State institution in our republic without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party...”

As such, the difference is clear. Under Bolshevism, 19 people made life and death decisions for millions. Under capitalism, 8 people make them. A massive improvement in terms of democracy, I am sure all would agree. Little wonder more people are turning to anarchism!

Project continues this theme:

“As I have pointed out, they did not start out with this outlook. In the early 1840s, they gravitated to socialist circles that held disdain for political action. What changed them? It was the Chartist movement in Great Britain that taught them the need for political struggles by the working class.”

In other words, Proyect is urging us to forget the last 150 years and embrace the political ideas Marx and Engels generalised from one section of the British working class movement in the 1840s! On the face of it, this it seems incredible that someone who, presumably, considers themselves a materialist could suggest this. After all, it is been a long time since the 1840s, we have new conditions facing us and, equally, we have had experience of applying Marx and Engels ideas on “political action.” If we do not ignore the last 150 years, we are struck by how the revolutionary labour movement was shunted into a dead-end by Marx and Engels ideas. Perhaps we can develop our own tactics based on the society we live in today?

Probably not, looking at the “Marxist” tradition. The perspective of reducing all tactics to those generated by one section of the British working class in the 1840s is not limited to Proyect. Marx and Engels did the same, arguing that every workers movement had to follow their ideas or be branded as a “sect.” Looking at the 1920s, we discover a similar process at work with the Bolsheviks. Lenin urged the reproduction of Bolshevik tactics by revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist nations. The experiences of revolutionaries in those countries were to be ignored, in favour of repeating the practices of an illegal party which operated in the barely capitalist Tsarist autocracy. The results, unsurprisingly, were hardly a success, suggesting that we should base our politics on our own experiences and the theory we develop from it (enriched, of course, by sharing of experiences and ideas and the studying of past struggles).

But what does history matter when we have the opinions of Marx and Engels? That the Chartists and Marx and Engels theory may be lacking is not in question for Proyect, particularly if we eliminate the means by which to evaluate them (i.e. the history of the socialist and labour movements from the 1840s onward)!

Proyect continues:

“While the fight for the ballot was crucial, Engels emphasised in *Conditions of the Working Class in England* that political democracy was not an end in itself, but a means for social equality. He writes, “Therein lies the difference between Chartist democracy and all previous political bourgeois democracy.”

Engels wrote other things in that book (and in the 1840s) which places the subsequent development of Marxism into sharper light. He notes that “it is evident that the working-men’s movement is divided into two sections, the Chartists and the Socialists. The Chartists are theoretically the more backward, the less developed, but they are genuine proletarians ... The Socialists are more far-seeing ... but proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working class. The union of Socialism with Chartism ... will be the next step ... Then, only when this has been achieved, will the working class be the true intellectual leader of England.” [*Collected Works*, vol. 4, pp. 526–7] Thus socialist ideas have to be introduced into the proletariat, as they are “more backward” and cannot be expected to develop theory for themselves! In the same year, he expounded on what this “union” would entail, when he wrote to a Chartist paper that “the union between the German philosophers ... and the German working men ... is all but accomplished. With the philosophers to think, and the working mean to fight for us, will any earthly power be strong enough to resist our progress?” [p. 236]

This vision of “advanced” bourgeois elements bringing enlightenment to the workers can, incidentally, be found in the *Communist Manifesto*: “a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves

to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.” It notes that the Communists are “the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties ... [and] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement.” [*Selected Works*, p. 44 and p. 46] Thus a portion of the bourgeois comprehend “the historical movement as a whole” and this is also the “advantage” of the Communist Party over “the great mass of the proletariat.”

The implications of the “vanguard” taking power, forming a “revolutionary” government, unfolded as Bakunin predicted during the Russian Revolution. Faced with rejection by the working class during the soviet elections of spring and summer of 1918 (which saw “great Bolshevik losses”), the Bolsheviks forcibly disbanded the soviets. They continually postponed elections and “pack[ed] local soviets once they could no longer count on an electoral majority” by giving representation to organisations they dominated which made workplace elections meaningless. [Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism*, pp. 23–4, p. 22 and p. 33] The regime remained “soviet” in name only.

These events occurred **before** the start of civil war. During the Civil War, Bolshevik ideology was brought into line with Bolshevik practice (just as revisionism brought social democratic ideology into line with its practice). As noted above, Lenin was acknowledging that he had created a one-party dictatorship in 1919. In 1920, Trotsky (in *Terrorism and Communism*) argued that there was “no substitution at all” when “the power of the party” replaces “the power of the working class.” Zinoviev argued at the 2nd Congress of the Comintern that “the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party.” [*Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920*, vol. 1, p. 152]

This is understandable. If the proletariat reject the “advanced” section, then the proletariat are “backward” and cannot understand “the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement.” Thus socialism, the result of study in the library of the “laws of capitalist accumulation” and not working class struggle, cannot be left in the hands of the “backward” and so the party has a duty to impose the correct line on the proletariat. Bakunin’s fears were proved right.

For Lenin in 1905, Marxists must be in favour of “From above as well as from below” and “renunciation of pressure also from above is **anarchism**” Why is this? Because, according to Lenin, “[p]ressure from below is pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government. Pressure from above is pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens.” [Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*, p. 196 and pp. 189–90] The subsequent history of Leninism in power proves that the “dictatorship of the proletariat” is, in fact, the “dictatorship **over** the proletariat” by the party (as the Bolsheviks admitted post-1918). This makes the following comments by Marx and Engels from *The Holy Family* take on frightening overtones:

“The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. The question is **what the proletariat is**, and what, consequent on that **being**, it will be compelled to do.” [quoted by Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, p. 280]

As Murray Bookchin argues:

“These lines and others like them in Marx’s writings were to provide the rationale for asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and

even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation than ‘even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,’ Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership.” [Op. Cit., p. 289]

This places Proyect’s subsequent comments into context:

“While Marx and Engels would eventually call for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system, they never abandoned the idea that the communists should constitute the most ‘advanced’ or ‘extreme wing’ of the ‘democratic party’ as they put it.”

This, of course, is a paraphrase of the Communist Manifesto. The differences in political awareness in society is something no anarchist would deny. The question what is the relation of these “advanced” sections to the class as a whole. Does the “advanced” grouping seek power for itself or does it aim to encourage working class self-management? For anarchists, this the key question. In the words of Murray Bookchin [*The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems*]:

“Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of a nationalised economy, a ‘workers’ republic’ might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin’s more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression.”

He continues:

“Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a ‘proletariat organised as a ruling class.’ If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty... [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish — and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established — well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society.”

This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not

turned into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution. The creation of a “strong government and centralism” will inevitably lead to a new class system being created. [Lenin, *Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?*, p. 75] The idea of the party being the “vanguard” of the working class, combined with its desire for centralised power, makes the dictatorship of the party **over** the proletariat inevitable (particularly given Engels comments quoted above). Thus we have the “advanced” communists (who seem to be from the bourgeois class) understanding the paths the proletariat must travel, who do the “thinking” for the workers whose role is to “do the fighting.” What happens when the proletariat rejects the guidance of its “advanced” wing? We had to wait to the Russian revolution to discover the fate that awaited it.

Am I being unfair to Marx and Engels? Such notable Marxists as Kautsky and Lenin (who simply repeated Kautsky’s orthodox position) argued that socialist ideas are not developed by workers by their own efforts but rather are injected into the labour movement from outside (by the radical middle class). Perhaps not. Marx did, of course, repeat Flora Tristin’s maxim that “the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself.” As such, Marxism has two sides, an authoritarian one and a libertarian one. Like any thinker, Marx had his inconsistencies and we need to be aware of that rather than enshrine him and his work. I am sure that this would be what Marx himself would have wanted.

Project continues:

“In the first wave of revolutions that swept Europe in 1848, Marx and Engels discovered that although democratic rights were in the interest of all classes arrayed against the feudal gentry and clergy, the only class that would fight resolutely was the working class. In Germany, the middle-class radical democrats lost their nerve in the fight against absolutism. This led Marx to theorise a ‘permanent revolution’ which would combine democratic and socialist goals led by the workers.”

Looking at this “permanent revolution” we discover Marx expounding what would be the Menshevik position during the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions, namely workers should fight for a bourgeois republic and organise themselves to force the democrats to be more extreme (“the demands of the workers must everywhere be governed by the concessions and measures of the democrats”). Thus the workers would fight to ensure that the bourgeois gets into power (in spite of the fact that Marx acknowledged that they would, and had, “turn their newly acquired power against the workers”) and, after an unspecified period, the Social Democrats would take power (even in the 1880s, Engels was still arguing that a proletarian revolution was not possible in Germany!). The idea of winning political rights first, then (eventually) fighting for socialism was dismissed by Bakunin:

“a political revolution should precede a social revolution... is a great and fatal error, because every political revolution taking place prior to and consequently without a social revolution must necessarily be a bourgeois revolution, and a bourgeois revolution can only be instrumental in bringing about bourgeois Socialism.” [*The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, p. 289]

For Bakunin, political and social revolutions must be combined. The working class should fight for their own interests, not letting themselves be limited to following the democrats. Bakunin’s

perspective was repeated by a Russian worker in 1906 when he expressed his impatience with Menshevik strategy:

“Here [the Mensheviks] ... tells us that the workers’ congress is the best means of assuring the independence of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution; otherwise, we workers will play the role of cannon fodder in it. So I ask: what is the insurance for? Will we really make the bourgeois revolution? Is it possible that we will spill blood twice – once for the victory of the bourgeois revolution, and the time for the victory of our proletarian revolution? No, comrades, it is not to be found in the party programme [that this must be so]; but if we workers are to spill blood, then only once, for freedom and socialism.” [quoted by Abraham Ascher, *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, p. 43]

In 1917, Lenin perceived that such a mood was widespread and consequently dumped Marx and embraced Bakunin (as he did, in rhetoric at least, with regards to “all power to the soviets”). I think that says it all.

Equally, looking at Marx’s arguments for “revolution in permanence,” we see that he stood for extreme centralisation of power. As he put it, the workers “must not only strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority.” He argued that in a nation like Germany “where there is so many relics of the Middle Ages to be abolished” it “must under no circumstances be permitted that every village, every town and every province should put a new obstacle in the path of revolutionary activity, which can proceed with full force from the centre.” He stressed that “[a]s in France in 1793 so today in Germany it is the task of the really revolutionary party to carry through the strictest centralisation.” [*The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 509–10]

In other words, revolution imposed from above by a “revolutionary” government. Rule by the people? No, rule by a handful of politicians at the centre, dictating to the rest of the country. Clearly, the vision of Marx as the arch democrat is flawed, unless you equate “democracy” with electing a central government and delegating popular power into the hands of a few “advanced” leaders. It is to Marx’s credit that he rejected this particular vision and embraced the libertarian influenced Paris Commune, so (ironically) confirming the soundness of key aspects of Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s ideas!

Not letting mere logic get in the way, Proyect states:

“After the suppression of the 1848 revolutions, a decade-long lull set in. What gave Marx and Engels encouragement was the emancipation of serfs in the Russia and John Brown’s uprising against slavery in the USA. They saw these events as precursors of ‘a new era of revolution’ which had opened up in 1863. The revival of a democratic movement would surely lead to an upsurge in the working class movement, as Marx indicated in a letter to Lincoln in 1864 on behalf of the International Working Man’s Association (IMWA): ‘The working men of Europe feel sure that, as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so would the American Anti-Slavery War will do for the working classes.’

The “emancipation” of the serfs was a self-reform by the Tsarist state, an attempt to undermine the social pressures within Russian society and ensure its survival. Simply put, the Tsar followed

Herzen and considered the abolition of serfdom from above as a much more desirable option than its abolition from below. As such, it had absolutely nothing to do with democratic politics.

The same can be said of John Brown's rebellion. As Emma Goldman noted, the "true patron saints of the black man" was not Lincoln, but the "handful of fighters ... whose great courage and sturdiness culminated in that sombre giant John Brwn." This action by militant minorities was the key, with "Lincoln and his minions follow[ing] only when abolition had become a practical issue, recognised as such by all." The actions of a militant minority, who took direct action, has more to do with anarchism than "democratic" politics. If the struggle against slavery had been conducted by the ballot box, perhaps we would still be waiting for the end of slavery as we waiting for the start of socialism?

It should also be noted that the "Anti-Slavery War" was no such thing. The American Civil War was a conflict between two side of the US ruling class. Again, with little to do with working class power or "democracy."

Project continues:

"In 1870, a big struggle opened up in the IWMA over Marx's proposal that two goals set the strategic agenda of the organization: 'To conquer political power has become the great duty of the working classes' and 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working class themselves.' In other words, the original inspiration from the Chartist movement lived on. His two main opponents were British trade union bureaucrats, who while giving lip service to the idea of working class independent politics, were aligned with the Liberal Party. The other was Bakunin."

This confusion of two distinct issues indicates the dishonesty of Project's approach. The "big struggle" in the IWMA was **not** over the "two goals" Project lists. Bakunin constantly stressed that the emancipation of the working classes was the work of the working classes themselves. Project would know this if he had bothered to read Bakunin's writings on the IWMA and how he viewed its development. What the "big struggle" actually involved was on the question of "political action" — i.e. should workers form a political party and take part in bourgeois elections. Project is distorting the issues.

Equally, Bakunin was not the "main opponent" to Marx's scheme. Rather, it was most of the European IWMA sections (i.e. the majority of the association). Bakunin was considered by many as a figurehead for this struggle, but this must not distract us from the essential fact that the majority of IWMA sections opposed "political action" in favour of economic organisation and direct action (what would latter be called syndicalism and was then called "collectivism").

So what was Bakunin's alternative to "political action"? He argued that while the communists "imagine they can attain their goal by the development and organisation of the political power of the working classes ... aided by bourgeois radicalism" anarchists "believe they can succeed only through the development and organisation of the non-political or anti-political power of the working classes." The Communists "believe it necessary to organise the workers' forces in order to seize the political power of the State," while anarchists "organise for the purpose of destroying it." Bakunin saw this in terms of creating new organs of working class power in opposition to the state, organised "from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with the associations, then going on to the communes, the region, the nations, and,

finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation.” [*Bakunin on Anarchism*, pp. 262–3 and p. 270] In other words, a system of workers’ councils or revolutionary unions. As such, he constantly argued for workers, peasants and artisans to organise into unions and join the International Workingmen’s Association, so becoming “a real force ... which knows what to do and is therefore capable of guiding the revolution in the direction marked out by the aspirations of the people: a serious international organisation of workers’ associations of all lands capable of replacing this departing world of states.” [Op. Cit., p. 174] He argued that the “organisation of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by the Chambers of Labour, not only create a great academy, in which the workers of the International, combining theory and practice, can and must study economic science, they also bear in themselves the living germs of **the new social order**, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.” [quoted by Rocker, Op. Cit., p. 45]

That Lenin payed lip-service to this vision in 1917 with his support for the soviets and the fact that more and more revolutionaries, in disgust at the reformism of social democracy, turned to syndicalism before the first world war suggests that Bakunin was proved right.

Lastly, it is significant that Proyect stops his diatribe in 1870. After all, after this year Marx’s ideas on political action were applied across the world. German Social-Democracy was the crown in the jewel of this movement. After Engels’ death in 1895, it was wracked by the so-called “revisionist” debate. This was the attempt by the reformers within the party to adjust the party’s (revolutionary) rhetoric to its (reformist) practice (the “distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action.” (C. Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, p. 38)). By 1914, the party sided with its ruling class and supported the Imperialist war. All of which confirmed Bakunin’s prediction that when “the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them.” [*The Basic Bakunin*, p. 108] The history of the Marxist Social Democratic Parties across the world proved him right.

Therefore it is understandable that for Proyect time stopped in 1870. To actually evaluate the actual historical record of Marx’s ideas would force him to question whether it was successful or not. Clearly, it was not.

Proyect ends as follows:

“(This article was intended to be the first in a series on anarchism. Because of the political upheavals taking place around the September 11th events, the issues that generated this article have been superseded for the foreseeable future. I may return to them in the future as dictated by political exigencies. 09/23/2001)”

Proyect’s essay is not “on anarchism.” It is on Bakunin. Anarchists are not “Bakuninists.” Therefore to critique anarchism it is necessary to critique those aspects of Bakunin’s ideas which anarchists accept. Instead of doing this Proyect simply cobbles together a series of personal attacks on Bakunin, his personal failings as well as distorting his actual ideas. Let us hope that when he returns to this subject he does actually bother to find out something about the theory he is trying to critique. I, for one, will not hold my breath!

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Anarcho
A reply to Louis Proyect's "A Marxist Critique of Bakunin"
Or "how not to critique anarchism."
January 25, 2011

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