

Anarchy in the USA

The International Working People's Association

Anarcho

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This article originally appeared in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 3, Number 2 (Summer 2023). It discussed the politics of the Chicago Martyrs and shows its links with the ideas of revolutionary anarchism expounded by Bakunin and Kropotkin. It also debunks attempts to portray them as Marxists when, in reality, they were Marxists who moved to anarchism.

In her report to the International Anarchist Conference held in Amsterdam in 1907, Emma Goldman noted that the Pittsburgh Congress of October 1883 saw the “beginning of Anarchism, as a distinct and independent movement in America”.¹ It was here that the International Working People’s Association (IWPA) was formed and which grew in strength until the police riot of 4th May 1886 and the resulting Red Scare which saw eight anarchists tried for conspiracy with five losing their lives as a result of class justice.

We will not discuss the events in early May in Chicago nor their legacy in the shape of International Workers’ Day here – they are too well-known.² Here we will concentrate on attempts by various writers to portray the Chicago Anarchists as something other than what they were, namely anarchist militants. As will become clear, these attempts – when not malicious – are the product of an ignorance of anarchist ideas and history. Needless to say, this does not absolve these historians as it is surely part of their job description to understand the theoretical and historical contexts of the individuals and movements they are commenting upon.

Debunking these claims will mean recounting events in the International and the conflict between Bakunin and Marx as well as explaining basic aspects of anarchism and Marxism. This is unavoidable as the accounts which proclaim the non-anarchist nature of the IWPA fail to define anarchism and fail to provide relevant context in terms of Marxism. Once this is done, the obvious becomes clear – the Chicago Martyrs were the anarchists both they and the authorities thought they were.

The Real Splits in the International

The origins of many of the misconceptions flow from a misunderstanding of the International and the role played by Marx and Bakunin within it. Far too often, commentators follow Marxist mythology on the matter so it is useful to note that Marx was not a “founder” of the International for he played no part in the discussions which lead to its initial meeting in 1864. That honour rests with British and French trade unionists.

Marx, indeed, attended the founding Congress but did not speak. This is not to deny the important role he played in the organisation, the writing of its Rules and Inaugural Address (an address, incidentally, not given at the meeting but written weeks afterwards), and so forth. However, this early work was useful precisely because it did *not* reflect Marx’s own political ideology (beyond a few vague comments in the Inaugural Address). He initially stressed that the International was open to all currents within the labour and socialist movements – understandably, for it to be

¹ Emma Goldman, “The Situation in America”, *Mother Earth*, October 1907.

² The best account is Paul Avrich’s *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Marxist would have meant expelling the very people who created it. Within the International, different tendencies could raise their ideas and try to secure wider support.³

Initially, the topics discussed at its Congresses reflected the ideas of the French mutualists who had helped found it but within its ranks arose what can only be described as a syndicalist current which stressed the role of trades unions as a means of both resisting and replacing capitalism and the State. When Bakunin joined the International in 1868, he championed these ideas and correctly predicted that electioneering would produce reformism.⁴ As he put it:

That the oppression and exploitation of which the toiling masses are victims in all countries, being in their nature and by their present organization internationally solidary, the deliverance of the proletariat must also be so; that the economic and social emancipation (foundation and preliminary condition of political emancipation) of the working-people of a country will be for ever impossible, if it is not effected simultaneously at least in the majority of the countries with which it finds itself bound by means of credit, industry, and commerce; and that, consequently, by the duty of fraternity as well as by enlightened self-interest, in the interest of their own salvation and of their near deliverance, the working-people of all trades are called upon to establish, organize, and exercise the strictest practical solidarity, communal, provincial, national, and international, beginning in their workshop, and then extending it to all their trade-societies and to the federation of all the trades – a solidarity which they ought above all scrupulously to observe and practise in all the developments, in all the catastrophes, and in all the incidents of the incessant struggle of the labor of the workingman against the capital of the bourgeois, such as strikes, demands for decrease of the hours of work and increase of wages, and, in general, all the claims which relate to the conditions of labor and to the existence, whether material or moral, of the working-people.⁵

Marx himself summarised Bakunin's position (reasonably accurately for once) as the "working class must not occupy itself with *politics*. They must only organise themselves by trades-unions. One fine day, by means of the *Internationale* they will supplant the place of all existing states."⁶ Yet this idea was widespread in the organisation and so Bakunin steadily gained influence.

With the Franco-Prussian war meaning that the planned Congress of 1870 could not take place and in the face of rising federalist influence – blamed by Marx on a conspiracy organised by Bakunin – Engels and Marx organised a Conference in London in September 1871. With knowledge of its calling closely guarded and its attendees carefully selected by Marx, it passed a resolution committing the International to "political action" and so – to use Kropotkin's later words – imposed a "disastrous resolution" by which "the forces of the Association, which until

³ As such, the Marxist claim that Bakunin sought to "take over" the International is nonsense and can only be explained by an unspoken premise that the International was owned by Marx rather than its members. Bakunin had the same right as any other member to spread his ideas and to communicate and associate with others to ensure that. Marx, after all, wrote many letters to his followers within the International and it is not explained why Bakunin should not have the same right. One is taken as normal, the other denounced as a conspiracy.

⁴ Iain McKay, "Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism," *Anarchist Studies* 20: 1 (Spring 2012).

⁵ "The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International", *Liberty*, 11 December 1886

⁶ Marx, "Marx to Paul Lafargue 19 April 1870", *Collected Works* 43: 490.

then were joined together for an economic-revolutionary struggle – the direct struggle of the workers unions against the capitalism of the bosses – were going to get involved in an electoral, political, and Parliamentary movement, where they could only wither and be destroyed.”⁷. “Political action” – with Marx stating that in countries like Britain and America workers could achieve socialism by peaceful means – was confirmed at the Hague Congress of 1872 by a majority, again, artificially engineered by Marx (utilising invented mandates, amongst other intrigues) which also expelled Bakunin and James Guillaume as well as moving the General Council of the International to America.

The Hague decisions were rejected by the vast majority of the International at the St. Imier Congress, which also confirmed its commitment to economic struggle, solidarity and organisation.⁸ While the rump of the International around Marx disappeared within a year, the Federalist-wing continued to hold Congresses until 1877 reiterating its positions to end. This can be seen from the resolutions passed at the International’s final (ninth) Congress:

The tendencies in modern production from the point of view of ownership

Considering that modern mode of production tends, from the point of view of ownership, towards the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few and increases the exploitation of workers.

That this state of affairs, the source of all social inequalities, must be changed.

Congress considers that the achievement of collective property, that is to say the taking possession of social capital by groups of workers, as a necessity; Congress further declares that a socialist party truly worthy of the name must place the principle of collective property, not in some distant future, but in its current programmes and in its daily activities.

What should be the attitude of the proletariat towards political parties?

Considering that the conquest of power is the natural tendency for all political parties and that this power has no other goal than the defence of economic privilege;

Considering, furthermore, that in reality current society is divided, not into political parties, but rather by economic conditions: exploiters and exploited, workers and bosses; wage-workers and capitalists;

Considering, moreover, that the antagonism that exists between the two categories cannot cease by the will of any government or power, but rather by the united efforts of all the exploited against their exploiters;

For these reasons:

Congress declares that it makes no distinction between the various *political* parties, whether they call themselves socialist or not: all these parties, without distinction, form in its eyes one reactionary mass and it believes it is its duty to fight all of them.

⁷ *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Chico: AK Press, 2018), 130.

⁸ Robert Graham, “The Birth of Revolutionary Anarchism”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Summer 2022).

It hopes that workers who still march in the ranks of these various parties, instructed by the lessons of experience and by revolutionary propaganda, will open their eyes and abandon the political path to adopt that of revolutionary socialism.

On the organisation of trade unions

The Congress, while recognising the important of trades unions and recommending their formation on an international basis, declares that trades unions that have no other aim than the improvement of workers' situation, either by the reduction of working hours, or by the setting of wage rates, will never achieve the emancipation of the proletariat; and that trades unions must propose, as their principal goal, the abolition of the proletariat, that is to say the abolition of bosses, taking possession of the instruments of labour and the expropriation of their owners.⁹

Thus, by the end of the 1870s, anarchists had been advocating the necessity of organising the class struggle on a non-parliamentarian, economic basis for over ten years and had defined this position in opposition to Marx's urging of "political action" for the labour movement.

"The Chicago Idea"

While organising the various sections of the American left had been attempted in October 1881 at the Chicago Social Revolutionary Congress, lasting success did not occur until the 1883 Pittsburgh Congress and the formation of the IWPA. The organisation drew adherents from many backgrounds, including mutualist anarchists such as Dyer Lum¹⁰ and those – like Albert Parsons and August Spies – who had previously been associated with the various Marxist political parties which had grown out of the International's American sections. The Congress issued a Manifesto which summarised its aims:

First – Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.

Second – Establishment of a free society based upon cooperative organization of production.

Third – Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organizations without commerce and profit-mongery.

Fourth – Organization of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes.

Fifth – Equal rights for all without distinction to sex or race.

Sixth – Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis.¹¹

⁹ *Bulletin de la Federation Jurassienne*, 23 September 1877.

¹⁰ Frank H. Brooks, "Ideology, Strategy, and Organization: Dyer Lum and the American Anarchist Movement", *Labor History*, vol. 34, No. 1 (1993).

¹¹ Quoted in Albert R. Parsons, "Autobiography of Albert R. Parsons", *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs* (New York: Monad Press, 1977), 42.

The IWPA is usually portrayed as having two main tendencies – one based in New York which favoured “propaganda by the deed” and another in Chicago which favoured working within the labour movement. The latter group – including Parsons and Spies – was responsible for this resolution passed at the 1883 Congress:

In consideration that we see in trades-unions advocating progressive principles – the abolishment of the wage-system – the corner-stone of a better and more just system of society than the present; and

In consideration, further, that these trades-unions consist of an army of robbed and disinherited fellow-sufferers, and brothers, called to overthrow the economic establishments of the present time for the purpose of general and free cooperation: Be it, therefore,

Resolved, That while we give such progressive trades-unions our fullest sympathy and assure them of every assistance in our power, we are, on the other hand, determined to fight and, if possible, to annihilate every organisation given to reactionary principles, as these are the enemies of the emancipation of the workingmen, as well as of humanity and of progress.¹²

Parsons later clarified this motion by noting while “Communist Anarchists or Internationalists... have on some occasions found it necessary to criticise adversely the tactics, propaganda and aims of some Trades unions”, the IWPA “recognises in the Trades Unions the embryonic group of the future ‘free society’. Every Trades Union is, *nolens volens*, an autonomous commune in the process of incubation. The Trades Union is a necessity of capitalistic production, and will yet take its place by superseding it under the system of universal free co-operation”.¹³ He also pointed to the Chicago unions IWPA members were active in:

The Central Labor Union seeks to organise all wage-workers, both men and women, into labour unions or groups with delegates to represent them in the central body... organising the vast army of employed and unemployed wage-workers, preparatory to an assault upon the strongholds of capitalism. The Central Labor Union is a revolutionary body which maintains that voluntary concessions by means of arbitration or legislation from the employing class is not to be expected. They therefore call upon all wage-labourers to organise and enforce their demands for the right to not only live, but live well, by every means in their power.¹⁴

The “free society would be purely economic in its character, dealing only with the production and distribution of wealth. The various occupations and individuals would voluntarily associate to conduct the processes of distribution and production... regulating all affairs to suit their pleasure. The Trades’ Union, [Knights of Labor] Assemblies and other labour organisations are but the initial groups of the free society.”¹⁵

¹² Quoted in Michael J. Schaack, *Anarchy and Anarchists: A History of Red Terror and the Social Revolution in America and Europe* (Chicago: F.J. Schulte & Company, 1889), 72.

¹³ “The International”, *The Alarm*, 4 April 1885; Also see: *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2003), 110, 173.

¹⁴ Albert R. Parsons, “Labor Circles”, *The Alarm* 31 October 1885.

¹⁵ Albert R. Parsons, “What Anarchy Means”, *The Alarm*, 7 March 1885.

“The land for the landless; the tools to the toilers; and the product to the producers,” stated Lucy Parsons, for “without this right to the free use of these things, the pursuit of happiness, the enjoyment of liberty and life itself are hollow mockeries.” She stressed the importance of “the advantages of a free society based upon the voluntary association of cooperative industry”.¹⁶ She also pointed to the future socialist society being built in the current struggle against capitalism:

I claim that a trades union and the Knights of Labor are practical illustrations of the feasibility of Anarchism. These men come together for a common purpose and each one subscribes to certain by-laws or rules. If a member violates those rules the society then and there decides what the penalty shall be.¹⁷

These ideas reflected those developed by the Federalist-wing of the International, as did the IWPA’s vision of revolution. As well as translating Kropotkin’s “Anarchistic Programme” of Expropriation,¹⁸ *The Alarm* also published an article from *Le Révolté* on the nature of the social revolution:

being victims of the capitalistic system of production which raises a barrier against our physical and intellectual development, we must take possession of foundries, workshops, factories and mines in order that we may be able to continue to produce what we require on a basis of equality and independently of any authority¹⁹

Albert Parsons included a similar vision of the social revolution in his book on *Anarchism*²⁰ and Dyer Lum indicated its widespread acceptance within the IWPA before the Haymarket events:

in common with the writers on the ALARM I believe the destruction of the existing economic system will be through revolutionary action... the means of production will be seized... by what is known as the Commune; that is, a voluntary association of workmen who take the tools and appliances of production into their possession when the legalized incubus is destroyed... trade associations will avail themselves of the existing plant set free from legalized capital.²¹

The final issue of *The Alarm* issued before the Haymarket events contained a summary of Proudhon’s ideas entitled “What is Property?”, explaining “the distinction between property and possession” and that to “discharge the employers”, the “workers will take forcible possession of the Instruments of Labor and work it by themselves and for themselves” while “pay no rent, and the landlords are discharged.”²² Indeed, Albert Parsons regularly echoed Proudhon’s position:

¹⁶ Quoted in Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H Kerr, 1976), 53.

¹⁷ Quoted in Ashbaugh, 173.

¹⁸ “Expropriation”, *The Alarm*, 20 March 1886.

¹⁹ “The Social Revolution”, *The Alarm*, 6 December 1884; Abridged from “La Propagande et la Révolution”, *Le Révolté*, 13 October 1883.

²⁰ “The Social Revolution”, *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*, 166.

²¹ Lum, “Is the Commune a Finality?”, *The Alarm*, 6 March 1886. This vision of the Commune echoes Kropotkin’s discussion in his article “La Commune” (*Le Révolté*, 1 and 15 May 1880) which was later included in *Words of a Rebel*.

²² Federic Tuffard, “What is Property?”, *The Alarm*, 24 April 1886.

“The tools by natural right belong to the toilers, the product to the producers, and whoever denies such right is an enemy of all mankind.”²³

The IWPA, in short, viewed the social revolution as did the Federalist International – namely the seizing (expropriation) of workplaces by workers’ unions who would then run them under self-management.

This recognition of the importance of the labour movement for anarchist activity and social revolution was combined with dynamite-bluster and certain distance from fighting for reforms. Thus the Chicago IWPA initially rejected the eight-hour movement by arguing that working hours cannot be permanently controlled by workers unless they expropriate capital:

There is but one way and only one to control the hours of labor, to-wit: *The laborer must control the means of labor – Capital!* The chance to labor and to live will then be no longer a favor granted, but a RIGHT-EXERCISED.²⁴

While correct, such a position failed to appreciate that such struggles build the strength of the labour movement and while reforms are always subject to attempts to undermine them – so requiring the abolition of capital to fully secure them – they can last for long periods of time and their defence can likewise build workers’ power. Faced with a rising mass movement for the eight-hour day, most in the Chicago IWPA recognised this and joined it – and their presence in the mass revolt was precisely what scared the ruling class (the eight-hour movement reminding them of the 1877 revolt²⁵) and which resulted in the juridical murders of November 11th, 1887.

This labour orientated approach in Chicago was combined with bomb-talk and violent rhetoric. While John Most was most associated with it, it cannot be denied that the Chicago anarchists indulged in it even if some of those who denounce this talk do so hypocritically if they support capitalism and its actual violence.²⁶ Much of this talk was defensive in nature – dynamite being glorified as an equaliser against the regular violent repression of strikes and protests by the State²⁷ – this did not stop such articles being seized upon by the State during the trial. However, this talk while often declared as “anarchist” as it expressed “propaganda by the deed” was alien to the ideas of revolutionary anarchism which had developed in the International and were reflected in “the Chicago Idea”.²⁸

²³ Albert R. Parsons, “An Open Letter”, *The Alarm*, 24 April 1886.

²⁴ Albert R. Parsons, “Eight Hours”, *The Alarm*, 8 August 1885.

²⁵ See the articles by Reclus and Kropotkin included in “Anarchism and the General Strike”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 2023).

²⁶ “The employers never tire of warning the strikers against using violence, but themselves never hesitate to employ violence in order to subdue the strikers when necessary. According to the ‘law’ there is no violence employed when employers starve the workman into subjection, but it is ‘unlawful and disorderly’ for the workers to resist this starvation process known as the lock-out, the discharge, etc.” (Albert R. Parsons, “The Police”, *The Alarm*, 22 August 1885).

²⁷ “The Anarchists are denounced for advising the use of force. We print below the expressions of the capitalists, made in connection with the ‘great strike’ of 1877. Our readers can judge for themselves who it is that not only advocate but *employ force* for the purpose of keeping the working people in subjection” (“Masters and Slaves”, *The Alarm*, 1 November 1884).

²⁸ These positions are not mutually exclusive as shown by Louis Lingg, a supporter of propaganda by the deed, who was also a union activist and organiser. (“Autobiography of Louis Lingg”, *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, 174, 176-7).

Anarchists, Socialists, Marxists?

Samuel Yellen authored an early attempt to portray the Chicago anarchists as something other than anarchist in 1936 when he proclaimed that John Most was a “disciple of Bakunin” and while in theory he “was not a pure anarchist... in practice advocated the anarchist tactics of terroristic action against Church and State by the individual on his own initiative.” Within the IWPA the Eastern city groups, “led by Most, favoured the individualistic tactics of anarchism” while Chicago and the Western cities “held for a mixture of anarchism and syndicalism” which “actually approached syndicalism closer than it did anarchism.”²⁹ This is echoed by Carolyn Ashbaugh in her flawed biography of Lucy Parsons who takes it further by denying they were anarchists at all, proclaiming them “syndicalists” only.³⁰

There is little to say about this nonsense other than that Yellen seemed as unaware of Bakunin’s syndicalism as the awkward fact he never advocated individual terror. Likewise, does the fact that Kropotkin and Malatesta also opposed these “anarchist tactics” and argued that anarchists had to encourage strong workers’ organisations mean that they, too, were not anarchist? Even the Bolshevik historian G.M. Stekloff acknowledged that the “Bakuninists may be looked upon as having been, to a considerable extent, the fathers of revolutionary syndicalism” and admitted resolutions passed at the Verviers Congress of 1877 “formulated the idea of replacing the socialist parties by the trade unions – an idea which is typical of the contemporary ‘revolutionary syndicalist’ movement”.³¹

It is more accurate to state that Most’s position was the *rejection* of anarchism – for “Most did not espouse unionism as a proper anarchist tactic” while “[d]ynamite terrorism has no basis in any anarchist theory or tradition; its appeal sprang directly from the spectacular assassination of Czar Alexander II” in 1881.³² Space, however, excludes discussion of “propaganda by the deed” beyond noting that it initially referred to such activities as going ahead with demonstrations which the authorities had banned and attempts at provoking popular insurrections.³³ Assassination was “*not* an act of propaganda by the deed” which was based on “the need for *collective* action which, contrary to a widespread impression, characterized [its] formulation”. Assassinations “reflected a ‘Republican’ rather than a socialist outlook and in addition risked misrepresentation which could destroy any value they may carry.”³⁴ Suffice to say, this is not how it is viewed by historians who tend to project notions derived from future events back to the early 1880s, if not even earlier.

The problem is fundamentally down to ignorance of anarchism. Usually, historians fail to define what anarchism is and so fail to clearly indicate why the IWPA does not meet that definition. Similarly with “socialism” and “anarchism”, the assumption being that the two are fundamentally different but that does not reflect their use at the time nor the actual origins of anarchism as a school of socialism. As Malatesta suggested in the 1890s as regards Italian Marxists:

²⁹ Samuel Yellen, *American Labor Struggles, 1877-1934* (New York: Pathfinder, 1974), 46.

³⁰ Iain McKay, “Lucy Parsons: American Anarchist”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 1 (Spring 2022).

³¹ G. M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1928), 308, 338.

³² Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 119, 76.

³³ Kropotkin opposed “propaganda by the deed” in all its forms, contrasting the need for anarchists to work amongst the masses to enflame “the spirit of revolt” – see the Introduction to *Words of a Rebel* (Oakland: PM Press, 2022).

³⁴ David Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism: a study of the political activities of Paul Brousse within the First International and the French socialist movement, 1870-90* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 123.

Avanti! has probably succumbed to an illusion.

If it really believes what it has said time and time again about anarchism – that anarchism is the very opposite of socialism – and if it carries on sitting in judgment of us on the basis of the misrepresentations and calumnies with which the German marxists, aping the example set by Marx in his dealings with Bakunin, disgraced themselves, then the fact is that, every time it may deign to read something we have written or listen to one of our speeches, it will be pleasantly surprised to discover an “evolution” in anarchism pointing in the direction of socialism, which it seems is almost synonymous with Marxism as far as *Avanti!* is concerned.

But anyone with even a superficial grasp of our ideas and history knows that, since its inception, anarchism has been merely the outworking and integration of the socialist idea and thus could not and cannot evolve *towards* socialism, which is to say towards itself.³⁵

This is applicable to the Chicago Martyrs with a British Marxist reviewer of Parsons’ book *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis* writing “there is little in the book with which Social-Democrats could not cordially agree, and we imagine that the Anarchism there defined has little in common with the Anarchism of the Bakunin school or with that professed by most avowed Anarchists today.” Anarchy, he asserted, being “that gospel of destruction according to Bakunin” and “a genuine Anarchist is not a Socialist at all, is on the contrary a most extreme individualist.”³⁶ Thus the reviewer knew what anarchism was far better than Parsons and, presumably, Kropotkin and Reclus. The arrogance – and ignorance – is staggering but, as we will see, it is not an isolated case.

Neither the use of socialist nor communist by members of the IWPA imply acceptance of Marxism as neither are monopolised by it – although its adherents have tried their best to do so. While it may make some sense (if only to reduce the word count!) to talk of Anarchists and Socialists rather than Anarchist-Socialists and State-Socialists, it should not mean forgetting that anarchists are socialists and aim to end capitalism along with the State.

Likewise with their use of the Red Flag.³⁷ Other anarchists raised it at the time and Proudhon and Bakunin associated themselves with it as it was the socialist symbol.³⁸ As did Kropotkin:

History shows us that the Anarchists have now remained the sole bearers of the Socialist ideal which inspired the great movement of the International twenty years ago. All parties have deserted the red flag, in proportion as they felt themselves nearer to power. This red flag — the hope of the toiling and suffering masses — is now our inheritance. Let us keep it firm, unstained; and let us live for it and, if necessary, die for it as our brethren of Chicago did.³⁹

³⁵ *Complete Works of Malatesta* (Chico: AK Press, 2016) III: 333.

³⁶ H. Quelch, “A Voice from the Grave”, *Justice*, 11 February 1888.

³⁷ Anarchist use of the Black Flag started in 1883 in France and while its use spread it did not displace the Red Flag for decades. Significantly, the Chicago IWPA raised the Black Flag alongside the Red in 1884. See the Appendix on “The Symbols of Anarchy” in *An Anarchist FAQ*.

³⁸ Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970) 47; Proudhon, *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 257-8.

³⁹ “Commemoration of the Chicago Martyrs”, *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, December 1892.

So this article would be much shorter if certain writers on the IWPA had read Kropotkin's statement that Anarchy was "the no-government system of socialism" and "most of the anarchists arrive at its ultimate conclusion, that is, at a complete negation of the wage-system and at communism." Before Marx, Proudhon had utilised the labour theory of value to create a critique of capital which argued the wage-labour ensured that workers were exploited. Even those anarchists who rejected that labour theory of value – like Kropotkin – did not doubt that capitalism resulted in a society which ensured the worker "agrees to sell his labour for a sum inferior to its real value." Like Proudhon, he stressed the need for workers' control: "The worker claims his share in the riches he produces; he claims his share in the management of production"⁴⁰ Given that Albert Parsons included this article in his book *Anarchism*, there is no excuse for this apparent ignorance.

It should also be noted that anarchists in Europe recognised the IWPA as comrades. *Le Révolté* reported that "an anarchist newspaper has appeared in Chicago: *The Alarm*" and an IWPA demonstration's "banners... carried mottos whose anarchic meaning is sufficiently clear and which we would do well to meditate on". It also quoted "comrade Parsons" as follows: "Get Organised, learn to defend yourself. Attack! This exploitative system must perish and the worker must become the master of his work."⁴¹ This appreciation was reciprocated with *The Alarm* publishing articles from *Le Révolté* and reporting on leading anarchists like Kropotkin and Louise Michel ("Our comrades" who "taught Socialism"⁴²).

Was the IWPA "Revolutionary Socialist" rather than Anarchist?

Historian Bruce C. Nelson proclaims that "[i]f European anarchist is identified with Proudhon and Kropotkin" and "immigrant anarchism with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, then the membership of Chicago's IWPA was not anarchist" and adds that "Bakunin never slept in Chicago." He, rightly, states that the IWPA's politics "should not be approached with twentieth-century labels".⁴³

Yet Nelson concludes that rather than being anarchists, the Internationalists were "Political Republicans," "Economic Socialists," "Social-Revolutionaries," "Atheists and Freethinkers." This meant that this "was not an evolution from socialism to anarchism but from republicanism, through electoral socialism, to revolutionary socialism." He is somewhat confused in his claims, also noting "Republican images pervaded socialist and anarchist rhetoric" and that "[i]f the Martyrs moved ideologically from socialism to anarchism, the active membership seems to have moved from republicanism, through parliamentary socialism, to revolutionary socialism."

⁴⁰ "The Scientific Basis of Anarchy", *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*, 111, 121, 113.

⁴¹ *Le Révolté*, 4 January 1885; 16 August 1885.

⁴² *The Alarm*, 23 January 1886.

⁴³ Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the martyrs: a social history of Chicago's anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 153, 171, 153. It would be churlish to note that Marx likewise never slept in Chicago – nor in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Peking, Havana, etc. – but that did not stop his ideas being advocated there. Unlike Marx, at least Bakunin set foot upon the Continent after he escaped from Siberia while Kropotkin did visit the city, visiting the graves of the Martyrs at Waldheim Cemetery, meeting anarchists and lecturing on anarchism. After he left, Lucy Parsons attended a symposium on the effect of his visit. (Paul Avrich, "Kropotkin in America", *Anarchist Portraits* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988], 99-102)

In short: “If ‘the Chicago Idea’ seems to anticipate anarcho-syndicalism or anarcho-communism, it can be better understood on and in its own terms, which were socialist, not anarchist.”⁴⁴

While Nelson is right to suggest that current notions should not be projected backwards, he seems to forget that anarchism, communism, socialism and anarchist-communism *were* nineteenth century “labels” familiar to the members of the IWPA. For example:

Anarchist-Communists seek the destruction of the capitalistic system of private property in capital. The capitalist is a robber and slave driver, but capital is a necessity without the use of which mankind cannot live. By the word capital is meant the resources of life and all the means of existence... Capital is the product of the combined labour of all, and is by natural law the inheritance of all, for the free use of all.⁴⁵

While Nelson is not, as far as can be seen, a Marxist, his arguments reflect an all-too-common Marxist narrative that anarchism and socialism are different things – something which Marxists in the 1880s were keen to proclaim but which anarchists at the time (as later) rejected as ignorant, sectarian nonsense. To quote one Marxist debater with Lucy Parsons:

Socialism means one thing and anarchy another... Mrs. Parsons spoke in this hall last Wednesday night, and she used the word socialist every time she should have used the word anarchist. Mrs. Parsons has no right to call herself a socialist. She is an anarchist and has avowed herself as such... I want you anarchists to understand that you will not be allowed to parade yourselves as socialists.⁴⁶

Nelson makes a distinction between “socialism” and “anarchism” which only appear valid given twentieth century assumptions. As such, to note that “the movement consistently preferred the adjective ‘socialist’” and that *The Alarm* and other IWPA papers referred to themselves in their masthead and elsewhere as “socialist” newspapers is not the significant fact he thinks it is.⁴⁷ After all, *Le Révolté* had from its launch on 22 February 1879 until its issue of 2 March 1884 “socialist organ” in its masthead before, for two issues, using “anarchist organ” and after that “communist-anarchist organ”.

In terms of “republicanism,” Proudhon considered himself as part of the French republican tradition – although a member deeply critical of its mainstream which was centralised, unitarian and Jacobin. Thus we find him arguing that monopoly “must republicanise itself or be destroyed”, advocating an “industrial republic” where “democratically organised workers’ associations” would be part of the “vast federation” which made up “the democratic and social Republic.” Thus a suitably modified “Republic is a positive anarchy”⁴⁸

Bakunin, likewise, “acknowledge[d] no political form other than the republican form”⁴⁹ and that “States must be abolished, for their only mission is to protect individual property, that is, to protect the exploitation by some privileged minority, of the collective labor of the mass of the

⁴⁴ Nelson, 171, 173, 241.

⁴⁵ Albert R. Parsons. “Confused Brains”, *The Alarm*, 5 September 1885.

⁴⁶ Quoted by Ashbaugh, 171.

⁴⁷ Nelson, 154-5.

⁴⁸ Proudhon, *Property is Theft!*, 255, 610, 377-8, 280.

⁴⁹ Bakunin, *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 174

people; for in that very way they prevent the development of the worldwide economic republic.”⁵⁰
As he summarised:

If socialism disputes radicalism, this is hardly in order to reverse it but rather to advance it. Socialism criticizes radicalism not for being what it is but, on the contrary, for not being enough so, for having stopped in midstream and thus having put itself in contradiction with the revolutionary principle, which we share with it. Revolutionary radicalism proclaimed the Rights of Man, for example, human rights. This will be its everlasting honor, but it dishonors itself today by resisting the great economic revolution without which every right is but an empty phrase and a trick. Revolutionary socialism, a legitimate child of radicalism, scorns its father’s hesitations, accuses it of inconsistency and cowardice, and goes further⁵¹

There is the “Republic-State” and there is “the system of the Republic-Commune, the Republic-Federation, i.e. the system of *Anarchism*. This is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the *State* and establishment of the economic, entirely free organisation of the people – organisation from bottom to top by means of federation.”⁵²

Proudhon and Bakunin moved from republicanism to socialism and a rejection of electoral politics. Neither aimed to abolish the idea of “one-person, one-vote” within their preferred federal socio-economic self-organisation. The process Nelson recounts mirrors this. Anarchism did not just pop into being, it evolved and we should not be surprised that it did so in different periods with similar environments and experiences – particularly when the latter evolution clearly knows of, and is informed by, the earlier one.

What of “Economic Socialists”? If by this it is meant State ownership and control of the economy, then anarchism is not socialist – and neither was the IWPA: “We do not believe in State Socialism. We are Socialists, pure and simple, where all titles are simple possessions”⁵³. As Adolph Fischer noted:

A number of persons claim that an anarchist cannot be a socialist, and a socialist not an anarchist. This is wrong... every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist... Politically we are anarchists, and economically, communists or socialists.⁵⁴

In terms of the non-anarchist socialists, he clearly understood the difference between them and anarchists:

In what respect do the social-democrats differ from the anarchists? The state socialists do not seek the abolition of the state, but they advocate the centralization of the means of production in the hands of the government, in other words, they want the government to be the controller of industry. Now, a socialist who is not a state-socialist must necessarily be an anarchist. It is utterly ridiculous of men like

⁵⁰ Bakunin, *The Basic Bakunin* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1994), 196.

⁵¹ Bakunin, 87.

⁵² Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (New York: The Free Press, 1953), 314.

⁵³ “State Socialism”, *The Alarm*, 22 November 1884.

⁵⁴ Adolph Fischer, “Autobiography of Adolph Fischer”, *The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs*, 80-1.

Dr. Aveling to state that they are neither state-socialists nor anarchists. Dr. Aveling has to be either one or the other.⁵⁵

The anarchists in contrast “have proven that the existing form of society is based upon the exploitation of one class by another; in plain words, upon legalized robbery. They say that few persons have no right whatever, to monopolize the resources of nature; and they urge the victims, the toilers, to take possession of the means of production, which belong to the people in common, and thus secure the full benefit of their toil.”⁵⁶ So while rejecting state socialism, the IWPA embraced an anti-authoritarian, associationist socialism based on common ownership of the means of production – as had Bakunin and Kropotkin.⁵⁷

In short, Nelson – despite his own warnings – is projecting back to the 1880s the twentieth century distancing of anarchism from “socialism” (i.e., social democracy and the Stalinist regimes) by many anarchists or taking at face-value Marxists attempts to excommunicate anarchism from socialism. Yet the latter has always been challenged by anarchists. Here is Emma Goldman stating the obvious:

While it is true that I am an Anarchist. I am also a Socialist. All Anarchists are Socialists, but not all Socialists are Anarchists. Anarchism is the higher form of Socialism. All Socialists who think and grow will be forced to the Anarchist conclusion. Anarchism is the inevitable goal of Socialism. We Anarchists believe in the socialisation of wealth and of land and of the means of production. But the doing away with capitalism is not a cure-all, and the substitution of the Socialistic state only means greater concentration and increase of governmental power. We believe in the revolution. The founders of Socialism believed in it. Karl Marx believed in it. All thinking Socialists of today believe in it. The political Socialists are only trimmers and they are no different from other politicians. In their mad effort to get offices they deny their birthright for a mess of pottage and sacrifice their true principles and real convictions on the polluted altar of politics.⁵⁸

While Nelson seeks to distance the IWPA from Goldman and Berkman, they themselves repeatedly indicated that they followed its ideas. Indeed, both were members of the Pioneers of

⁵⁵ Fischer, 81. Aveling had declared himself “not an advocate of State Socialism” in Boston when asked a question by Benjamin Tucker, who likewise considered this reply as “absurd” given what Aveling had argued at the meeting and dismissed him as a “charlatan” who “is too ignorant regarding Anarchism to warrant him in publicly discussing it”. (*Liberty*, 30 October 1886).

⁵⁶ Fischer, 83.

⁵⁷ In terms of individualist and communist anarchism, it should be noted that Tucker called himself a socialist for he aimed at a non-exploitative economic system in which the workers would secure the product of their labour. The disagreement between social and individualist anarchists rests on how this ending of exploitation can occur. Ironically, the IWPA was closer to Proudhon’s ideas than his erstwhile American followers in spite of Fischer suggesting that the “Proudhon anarchists, however, although being opposed to the state and political authority, do not advocate the co-operative system of production, and the common ownership of the means of production, the products and the land.” (Fischer, 8) In reality, Proudhon – if not Tucker – did advocate co-operatives based on common ownership albeit one based on market exchange of the products. See: Iain McKay, “Proudhon, Property and Possession,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 66 (Winter 2016).

⁵⁸ “Anarchists Socialists” *The Agitator*, 1 April 1911.

Liberty, the first Jewish anarchist group in America, which “affiliated itself with the International Working People’s Association”.⁵⁹ Both became anarchists as a direct result of the Haymarket events. Berkman recalled that he “became an Anarchist and decided to devote my life and energy to the cause of the Chicago Martyrs.”⁶⁰ Likewise Goldman:

I began to read *Die Freiheit* regularly. I sent for the literature advertised in the paper and I devoured every line on anarchism I could get, every word about the men, their lives, their work. I read about their heroic stand while on trial and their marvellous defence. I saw a new world opening before me.⁶¹

Unsurprisingly, Goldman recognised “that in this country five men had to pay with their lives because they advocated Syndicalist methods as the most effective, in the struggle of labor against capital”. She rightly traced syndicalism back to the International and “the split in the revolutionary movement of that day, and its division into two factions: the one, under Marx and Engels, aiming at political conquest; the other, under Bakunin and the Latin workers, forging ahead along industrial [unionist] and Syndicalist lines”. Thus: “Syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism”.⁶²

Nelson also notes that Albert Parson’s book included extracts from Marx’s economic analysis along with anarchists like Kropotkin.⁶³ This means little, given that Bakunin recognised the importance of *Capital* and its analysis. If agreeing with the idea that capital exploits workers by appropriating the surplus-value of labour then Bakunin – and Kropotkin, etc. – were all “Marxists.” Indeed, this analysis predates *Capital* for Proudhon expounded a similar analysis twenty-years before – as did the so-called British “Ricardian Socialists” before him.

Unfortunately, it is left for the reader to work out what is meant by anarchism, for the politics of Bakunin and Kropotkin are not actually defined. Both rejected “political action” in favour of reforms and revolution by direct struggle by labour organisations – which is precisely “the Chicago Idea.” So the IWPA was indeed revolutionary socialist but that was *because* it was anarchist.

Was the IWPA Marxist rather than Anarchist?

The claim that the Chicago IWPA was Marxist rather than Anarchist has been made by historian James Green and Leninist Paul Le Blanc. Both rest on weak evidence and an apparent ignorance of both Anarchism and Marxism.

First, we must note that the fact that many members of the IWPA came from Marxist parties adds a certain difficulty. As would be expected, individuals developed towards anarchism faster and further than others, as well as being varied in terms of how much they retained and rejected of their Marxism both in theory and in terminology. Also, there is significant overlap in Marxism and Anarchism as both are socialist schools. Both share an analysis of capitalism as exploitative due to wage-labour and an analysis of the State as an instrument of class rule. Someone who

⁵⁹ Paul and Karen Avrich, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 25.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Paul and Karen Avrich, 23.

⁶¹ Emma Goldman. *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970) I: 9-10.

⁶² “Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism”, *Red Emma Speaks* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 87, 88, 91.

⁶³ Nelson, 161.

mistakenly thinks that anarchism is just opposed to the State would find “Marxist” influences in writings which simply reflect anarchist perspectives. The important differences between the two schools of socialism are current tactics and revolutionary strategy – anarchists reject electioneering and the transitional State of Marxism in favour of building federated workers’ councils or unions to both fight and replace capital and its State.⁶⁴

Green raised the notion that the Chicago IWPA were Marxists in his book *Death in the Haymarket*.⁶⁵ This is a somewhat confused work when it comes to explaining the ideas of the IWPA and, indeed, those of Marx, Bakunin and others.

He starts by stating that in the 1870s “the German socialists in the [Socialist] party turned away from electoral competition and adopted Karl Marx’s strategy of organising workers” of “building class-conscious trade unions as a basis for future political action.”⁶⁶ The idea that there was a division in the ranks of American socialists in the 1870s between “Lassalleans” who favoured immediately standing in elections and “Marxists” who favoured union activity first is commonplace. One Marxist historian comments upon “the basic Marxist approach to the labor movement” related by Marx’s “letters to his followers” in America: “the creation of effective trade unions capable of conducting economic struggles had to precede the achievement of political power by the working class.”⁶⁷ One letter is referenced which simply states in general terms Marx’s view that a political party of labour arises from previous economic struggles and organisation rather than giving specific instructions. In relation to “Marxists” fighting the “Lassalleans” in the 1870s over working in the unions, it is claimed that Friedrich A. Sorge was “in constant correspondence with Marx and Engels”⁶⁸ yet only three letters are referenced, of which two date from 1880 and 1883 (and do not argue this anyway) while the third dates from 1865 and does not mention unions.

If the “Marxists” in America were arguing to build unions before pursuing political action then it was not due to instructions from Marx and Engels. Given that Marx had imposed the need for “political action” onto the International before moving the General Council to America, it would appear that the “Lassalleans” were the ones following his publicly stated policy – particularly as he had indicated that America was one of the countries where workers could use the ballot-box to achieve socialism. Unsurprisingly, then, the socialists associated with the International in America formed a political party and this did stand in elections in the 1870s.⁶⁹ They *may* have conducted union work alongside this political action but the notion that they forsook “political

⁶⁴ Anarchist opposition to State socialism is based on the awareness that the State has evolved certain characteristics to dispossess the masses to secure minority class rule and to keep those structures would continue this dispossession of the masses, creating rule by a new minority class. It has nothing to do with failing to acknowledge a revolution needs defending, that the legacy of class society will take time to transform or that these and other activities require co-ordinated (federated) social organisations.

⁶⁵ James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America* (Anchor Books, 2007).

⁶⁶ Green, 50.

⁶⁷ Philip S. Foner, *The Workingmen’s Party of the United States: A History of the First Marxist Party in the Americas* (Minneapolis: MEP Publications, 1984), 19-20.

⁶⁸ Foner, 20.

⁶⁹ So keen to make the Chicago IWPA Marxists, Green misreads his reference. The American International existed for four years before he claimed it was “formed” in “the spring of 1874” and while it did change its name at this time to the International Working People’s Association, this was not the same organisation that was created in 1883. In fact, it dissolved itself into the Workingmen’s Party of the United States in the summer of 1876 which in turn became the Socialistic Labor Party in 1877. Both parties stood in elections. (Bruce, 53-7).

action” in the 1870s is simply not true – and, moreover, this was completely consistent with Marx’s actual strategy. It was the disillusionment with this by these Marxists which lead them to anarchism.

Green then moves onto anarchism and this also leaves much to be desired. He seems unaware that the International had not been “dissolved” by Marx but had continued until 1877 by the efforts of “the anarchist followers of Mikhail Bakunin” Marx “feared” would capture it in 1872.⁷⁰ He tries to contextualise the IWPA within European developments by stating the anarchists attending the 1881 Conference in London had the “belief that socialist propaganda could not effectively reach workers through trade unions and political parties; nor would revolutionary change result from strikes, mass demonstrations and election campaigns”. A “new method” was needed, “propaganda by deed... an *attentat*, a violent act planned by a secret conspiracy and committed by a dedicated militant, could... arouse the masses and trigger a popular insurrection”.⁷¹ In reality, as discussed elsewhere, this is simply wrong. The London Congress was not a purely anarchist affair and many of the delegates (including Kropotkin) did think socialists had to be involved in trade unions because strikes and demonstrations could and did produce revolutionary situations.⁷²

Most rather than Kropotkin is Green’s preferred anarchist as he fits the image better (in spite numerous historians noting by Most’s anarchism became consistent only after 1886⁷³). This ignorance of anarchism is also shown when he suggests that the Chicago militants “did not fully embrace [Most’s] view that individual acts of violence would provoke a revolution: Indeed, they faithfully adhered to the lesson they had learned from Karl Marx: that socialism could be achieved only through the collective power of workers organised into aggressive trade unions”.⁷⁴ Except, of course, Marx advocated no such thing. Yes, Marx supported unions, but he did not think the workers movements should be limited to these. Rather, he argued for the creation of workers’ parties and “political action” in the shape of standing for elections. Indeed, he explicitly mocked Bakunin for advocating the ideas Green proclaims as Marx’s.

Green shows a shocking lack of understanding of anarchism and Marxism by suggesting that if the IWPA “continued to label their publications socialist in 1885” it was “because they adhered to Marx’s belief that capitalism would be destroyed by its own contradictions and by the inevitable emergence of a class-conscious movement of workers prepared to abolish private property along with the forms of government that sanctioned and protected it.”⁷⁵ In reality, they continued to label their journals socialist because anarchism is a school of socialism. Unfamiliarity with anarchism is also shown when Green considers Albert Parsons’ explanation that “the

⁷⁰ Marx, in fact, moved the General Council to New York in 1872 and its 1873 Congress in Geneva was a “fiasco” (to use Marx’s word). It then lingered on until 1876 when a meeting in America made its non-existence official. “Nearly all the federations of the old International rallied to” the Federalist International. (Stekloff, 278, 266) That one person could “dissolve” a democratic association raises no questions for Green nor does he mention the Federalist International which shows that this did *not* happen.

⁷¹ Green, 92, 93.

⁷² Iain McKay, “The London Congress of 1881”, *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 2023).

⁷³ Goyens, 126; Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 214; Henry David, *The history of the Haymarket affair: a study in the American social-revolutionary and labor movements* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), 109, 103. Space excludes further discussion beyond noting that while his critique of capitalism and vision of a free society were anarchist, his tactics at this time (replacing labour union activism with individual terror) and vision of social revolution (rule by revolutionary committees which would massacre opponents) were not. He only became consistently anarchist towards the end of the 1880s

⁷⁴ Green, 129-130.

⁷⁵ Green, 128-9.

Chicago socialists initially accepted the anarchist label in defiance of their enemies who branded them with the name⁷⁶ as “bizarre” yet Parsons was repeating Kropotkin’s arguments which had been translated in *The Alarm*.⁷⁷

Looking at *The Alarm*, it becomes clear that the members of the IWPA did more than “salted their speeches and pamphlets” with “mottoes... from the writings of Proudhon, who believed property was theft; and from the anarchist pronouncements of Mikhail Bakunin and Johann Most.”⁷⁸ It published articles on anarchism by its members, translated works by leading anarchists like Kropotkin and Reclus and from European anarchist papers as well as reporting on the international anarchist movement. It was clearly an anarchist journal.

Green admits that they “had given up hope of finding a peaceful path to socialism via elections and legislative changes, that they had broken decisively with their former comrades in the Socialistic Labor Party”⁷⁹ (SLP) but fails to also admit this meant rejecting Marx in favour of Bakunin. Likewise, if “the city’s revolutionaries remained convinced by Marx and Engels that the road to socialism was a long one and that there were no shortcuts through individual acts of terror”⁸⁰ then they shared this perspective with Bakunin, Kropotkin and other anarchists.

As such, there really is no need to invoke Marx and Engels for positions which they either shared with anarchists or explicitly rejected. Ironically, Green does get close to the facts at one point:

The Chicago militants thought of themselves as socialists of the anarchist type – that is, as revolutionaries who believed in liberating society from all state control, whether capitalist or socialist. Anarchists proclaimed that true freedom in a socialist society could be gained in self-governing communities and workplaces where working people determined their rights and responsibilities democratically, without the domination of a powerful national state with its judges and laws, its police forces and armies.⁸¹

It is one thing to note that they were anarchists who had been Marxists and remained influenced by Marx, another to claim that they were still Marxists after they had embraced anarchist positions.

We now turn to Leninist Paul Le Blanc who is far more assertive than Green on the Marxism of the Chicago Anarchists.⁸² He bases this on four main claims which will be discussed in turn.

1) “one leading member of the Chicago IWPA later recalled: ‘One time the Pittsburgh program with which many were unsatisfied was discussed. Spies explained: “The Pittsburgh program is secondary, our program is the *Communist Manifesto!*” Spies had Parsons, Gorsuch and other Americans around him in the office of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* on whom he impressed the basic teachings of the booklet.’”

⁷⁶ Green, 131.

⁷⁷ “L’Ordre”, *Le Révolté*, 1 October 1881 (later included in *Words of a Rebel*); “Order and Anarchy: A Statement of the Principles of Capitalism and Anarchism”, *The Alarm*, 13 December 1884.

⁷⁸ Green, 130-1.

⁷⁹ Green, 128.

⁸⁰ Green, 96.

⁸¹ Green, 129.

⁸² Paul Le Blanc, *Left Americana: The Radical Heart of US History* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017).

His source does not specify when this discussion took place. As noted, many in the IWPA were originally Marxists and the progression towards anarchism undoubtedly varied from individual to individual. It is therefore possible that Spies uttered these words and afterwards came to reject the programme of the *Communist Manifesto*. Recall that this programme was “rais[ing] the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy and “wrest[ing], by degree, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State”⁸³, positions which were regularly rejected in *The Alarm* and other publications. Indeed, Spies himself gave a speech in early 1886 – quoting Proudhon, Bakunin and Reclus – rejecting political action and arguing that the State would inevitably create a privileged hierarchy.⁸⁴

So this claim fails to recognise the changing views within the IWPA and so is, somewhat ironically for a Marxist, undialectical.

2) “Parsons himself argued ‘the IWPA was not founded by Bakunin.’ He traced its ancestry back to... the First International, headed by Marx... adding ‘The distinctive feature of the manifesto of the Pittsburgh Labor Congress, was opposition to centralized power, abolition of authoritative, compulsory or force government in any form... The IWPA is *not* in opposition to Marx... The first publication ever issued by the IWPA was written by Marx and Engels’ – the *Communist Manifesto*”⁸⁵

This claim is based on a misreading of a letter by Parsons⁸⁶ made by Carolyn Ashbaugh. Reading the actual letter, it becomes clear that Parsons was addressing various inaccuracies in a book review published in *The Knights of Labor*, one of which was the claim that the IWPA had been formed by Bakunin in 1872. Yet, like Parsons, the Federalist International traced its ancestry back to the body created in 1864 rather than one formed at the St. Imier Congress of 1872. This is why the last Congress of the International in 1877 was its ninth. As for “headed by Marx” this simply reflects Marxist bolstering of Marx’s position in the International. While he was a member of the General Council and played a significant role in it, at no time was the International a Marxist body. Indeed, when Marx sought to impose his political ideas on it, the bulk of the organisation rejected this and he ended up expelling nearly every national Federation.

The reviewer also took issue when the book stated that the “IWA differs only in a few particulars from the IWPA” as Bakunin “and Marx differed in more than a few particulars” (hence his expulsion). This suggests that Parsons was simply noting the similarities between Marx and Bakunin which the reviewer was denying. Given that the IWPA, like the Federalist International, aimed to unite the labour movement around economic organisation and struggle as had the International in 1864, Parsons was right as Marx was a member of the International from 1864 to 1872 and could have been a member of the Federalist International (each federation could also pursue its own favoured political strategy, simply not make it mandatory on all sections as Marx sought). It is doubtful that Marx would have subscribed to “opposition to centralized power, abolition of authoritative, compulsory or force government in any form” but that is another issue. As for the *Communist Manifesto*, that was sold alongside a host of other pamphlets including those by Bakunin and Reclus so hardly has the significance Le Blanc thinks it has.

So this claim falls due to an unwillingness to investigate the original letter, relying on a biased and ignorant source and failing to understand the history of the International.

⁸³ Marx and Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”, *Collected Works* 6:504

⁸⁴ “Anarchism”, *The Alarm*, 6 and 20 February 1886.

⁸⁵ Le Blanc, 39.

⁸⁶ Albert R. Parsons, “A Correction”, *The Knights of Labor*, 11 December 1886.

3) “A study of the *Alarm*... reveals many more positive references to Marx than to Bakunin”⁸⁷
This is an invention as the reference Le Blanc provides makes no such claim on the page given – or anywhere else in the book.

Interestingly, *The Alarm* quoted *Liberty*’s critique of a “State Socialist” comments on Bakunin as being a product of “fearing the effect of Bakunin’s tremendous onslaught on State Socialism, felt the necessity of combating him, and saw no other way to do it successfully than to attribute to him opinions which he never thought of championing.”⁸⁸

4) “Another revealing text regarding Parson’s views on Marx is [his book] *Anarchism*... [which] is divided into two parts. The first offers an explicitly Marxist analysis of capitalism, with lengthy extracts from the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*. It offers an outline of American history from colonial times to 1886, in which Parsons attempts to apply Marx’s materialist conception of history to the United States. The second half of the book contains extracts from speeches of Parsons and codefendants... followed by several anarchist essays by Peter Kropotkin and others, condemning the institution of the state and describing a stateless communism. These explicitly anarchist selections were undoubtedly appealing because the Marxist analysis of the state... was not available to most socialists in this period”.⁸⁹

The “second half of the book” is misleading for the first part amounts to less than 20% of the book (38 pages), the second to 75% (150 pages). In terms of the first part, the sections by Parsons are an account of the development of capitalism in America, the conflict between the economic interests associated with slavery and wage-labour, and notes the increase in industry and the corresponding rise of the proletariat. This, to state the obvious, is *not* an exclusively Marxist analysis. Proudhon had analysed this process in *System of Economic Contradictions* (1846) and recognised in *Du Principe fédératif* (1863) that the civil war was simply the exploiters of the North and South fighting only over the type of servitude workers would suffer – whether as slaves or proletarians. This explains why *Freedom*’s review of Parsons’ book mentions “Marx and the historical school of economists” but, unlike Le Blanc, did not view it significant and urged “our readers to obtain a copy as soon as possible”.⁹⁰

Significantly, Parsons *diverts* from Marx when he stresses that economic slavery means political slavery:

One hundred years’ experience proves, that those who control the industries of the country control its votes; that wealth votes; that poverty cannot vote; that citizens who must sell their labor or starve, will sell their votes when the same alternative is presented. The working-class of the United States have been deluded for one hundred years, with the belief that they possessed political sovereignty and law-making powers... Political liberty is possessed by those only who also possess economic liberty.⁹¹

Compare this to Marx who stated that the “fundamental contradiction” of a democracy under capitalism is that the classes “whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate” it “puts

⁸⁷ Le Blanc, 39.

⁸⁸ *The Alarm*, 23 January 1886.

⁸⁹ Le Blanc, 40.

⁹⁰ “A Voice from the Dead”, *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism*, February 1888.

⁹¹ *Anarchism*, 21.

in possession of political power through universal suffrage.”⁹² He listed America amongst the countries where the proletariat could achieve its goals by electoral means, as did Engels (positions Le Blanc fails to mention). In contrast, anarchists had argued that the workers’ political power under capitalism did not exist due to their economic situation:

The International declares that, so long as the working masses shall remain plunged in misery, in economic servitude, and in this forced ignorance to which economic organization and present society condemn them, all the political reforms and revolutions... will avail them nothing.⁹³

So, yes, this is a “revealing text” as it does not support Le Blanc’s claims. It is undoubtedly materialist but it reflects either views shared by anarchists and Marx or, crucially, only held by anarchists.

As for the notion Parsons included works by Kropotkin and other anarchists because of a lack of Marxist accounts of the State, the more obvious reason was that he *agreed* with them. Likewise, it is churlish – but essential – to note that Kropotkin and Reclus also condemned capitalism along with the state. To fail to mention this misleads the reader for anarchism has never been just against the State, it has always been socialist (indeed, its opposition to the State is driven by its socialism). Yet to acknowledge this would undermine the importance he attaches to the fact that members of the IWPA “considered themselves, equally, anarchists and socialists and communists”⁹⁴ – for so did Kropotkin, Malatesta and other anarchist-communists. As for Bakunin and Proudhon, they considered themselves as anarchists and socialists (as did Benjamin Tucker, whose ideas Le Blanc misunderstands).

Evidence of an awareness of anarchism is lacking. Bakunin, for example, was not someone “who romantically extolled the liberating qualities of violence” nor was Sergi Nechayev “his disciple” (in fact Bakunin broke with him over his *Catechism for Revolutionaries*) and the notion that Kropotkin “thoughtfully theorized what the hoped-for future society would look like” at this time shows a woeful ignorance of his writings.⁹⁵ Le Blanc’s Kropotkin comment is presumably a reference to *The Conquest of Bread*, which was published in 1892 based on articles written after his release from prison in 1886 and, moreover, it concentrates on what a social revolution required to be successful. Between 1877 and 1883, Kropotkin was focused critiquing capitalist society, stressing the need for the labour movement to follow the example of the Federalist International (this being a constant theme of his writings, incidentally) and discussing what was needed to achieve a social revolution – expropriation of property by the workers directly. Any discussion of “the hoped for future society” was rare at this time (if slightly more common in later years).

Then there is the question of the IWPA’s federalism for both the current struggle against capitalism and the future socialist society. Le Blanc mentions this in passing but does not explain why their “decentralist predilections helped guarantee that the successes of the Chicago IWPA would not be duplicated in other cities”⁹⁶, presumably because Marxist dogma asserts that centralism is

⁹² “The Class Struggles in France”, *Collected Works* 10: 79

⁹³ Bakunin, “The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International”, *Liberty*, 20 November 1886.

⁹⁴ Le Blanc, xxxi.

⁹⁵ Le Blanc, 46.

⁹⁶ Le Blanc, 56.

better. Nor does he mention their experience of Marxist parties such as the Workingmen's Party of the United States whose "unified party's platform clearly reflected the dominance of Marxist thinking" with its centralised national organisation and a "basic Marxist electoral strategy".⁹⁷ The IWPA's support for federalism reflected the lessons they had drawn from being members of such organisations. He also assumes that the pro-union section was the majority when it was possible that, as in the SLP and its ancestor parties, they were the minority and so would never had been allowed to pursue their activities in a centralist regime. Likewise, he ignores the power centralisation places into the hands of a few leaders who then use it to secure their position and stifle – or expel – dissidents. Federalism, in contrast, empowers the membership and allows different sections to pursue different tactics and so show in practice which is more fruitful.

The fundamental problem is that Le Blanc *fails* "to look at the living movement that these revolutionaries helped to lead"⁹⁸ as he promises. Rather, he simply parrots Marxist nonsense about anarchism as if it were accurate and relies on secondary sources which reflect his prejudices. Someone who actually reads *The Alarm* could not suggest that the IWPA was anything other than anarchist.

Ultimately, it is hard to combine praise like "Parsons and Spies were among the finest that our working class has produced", had "a deep thoughtfulness" and were "amazingly perceptive" with the claim that they did not understand the ideas that they advocated, that they lacked the ability to comprehend that they were really Marxists – but then that incapacity was apparently widespread in their contemporaries whether they considered themselves Marxists (like Engels) or Anarchists (like Kropotkin). Still, we can agree that their "outlook contained not only an inspiring vision but also considerable sophistication, which made them a force to be reckoned with"⁹⁹ for that was because they were anarchists as Le Blanc inadvertently shows:

The approach of the Chicagoans [was] a revolutionary rejection of electoralism, combined with a focus on building a mass working-class movement through trade union efforts and other struggles for economic justice¹⁰⁰

In short, the very thing which Marx had mocked Bakunin for advocating in the International. Hence the irony of his suggestion that "the so-called anarchists were far closer to revolutionary Marxism than were the moderate leaders of the SLP"¹⁰¹ given that the party followed Marx's strategy and organisational principles.

Le Blanc refuses to acknowledge this and insists on claiming that it is "misleading to simply label" the Martyrs as anarchists for the "word had a different connotation for them than it does today. The sharp differentiation between socialism and anarchism developed only in later years."¹⁰² Sadly, he fails to inform his readers what this "different connotation" was and how it differs from that held today. As such, the statement is meaningless.¹⁰³ Likewise, the "sharp differentiation between socialism and anarchism" was something Marxists at the time insisted upon

⁹⁷ Philip S. Foner, *The Workingmen's Party of the United States: A History of the First Marxist Party in the Americas* (Minneapolis: MEP Publications, 1984), 27-8.

⁹⁸ Le Blanc, 40.

⁹⁹ Le Blanc, 56, 57, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Le Blanc, 41.

¹⁰¹ Le Blanc, 40.

¹⁰² Le Blanc, 40.

¹⁰³ Yet anarchism apparently changing does not stop Marxists reprinting the attacks of Marx, Engels and others on it. If these are still applicable, then surely it has not changed?

when they rejected anarchist claims to being socialists. Still, given that Marxism in practice simply confirmed anarchist warnings it is understandable if – in the face of reformist opportunism and Bolshevik State capitalist tyranny – anarchists came to differentiate themselves from what “socialism” came to mean for the general public.

As well as the factual and contextual issues with Green’s and Le Blanc’s assertions, another problem is that no Marxist at the time suggested the IWPA was anything other than anarchist.

The SLP denounced any suggestion that the IWPA was socialist and the “language [of its official paper] became more vituperous – indistinguishable, finally, from that used in the German-American middle-class press – in an article highlighting the party’s ideological distinctions between socialism and anarchism. The Chicago anarchists were called ‘a band of robbers, incendiaries and murderers,’ ‘desperados,’ and ‘our most bitter enemies.’”¹⁰⁴

As the SLP is generally not viewed positively by Leninists we can move on to Engels, who neither publicly nor privately suggested the IWPA was Marxist (indeed, he only wrote slightly more than Marx about it and, unlike Marx, did not have the excuse of being in the grave). Privately, he was dismissive and suggested that “[n]o doubt the Chicago affair will put paid to the anarchist farce in America. The chaps can shout their heads off if they want, but pointless rowdyism is something the Americans refuse to put up with, now they have become an industrial nation.”¹⁰⁵ Publicly, he made a passing reference to the events in Chicago in 1887, noting in “May the struggle for the Eight Hours’ working-day, the troubles in Chicago, Milwaukee, etc., [were] the attempts of the ruling class to crush the nascent uprising of Labor by brute force and brutal class-justice.”¹⁰⁶ This reflected the standard European Social-Democratic perspective of rejecting the Martyrs’ anarchism but recognising the class-justice involved in their trial and subsequent judicial murder.¹⁰⁷ Engels, moreover, stressed the importance of the electoral politics which the IWPA had come to reject:

And with true American instinct this consciousness led them at once to take the next step towards their deliverance: the formation of a political workingmen’s party, with a platform of its own, and with the conquest of the Capitol and the White House for its goal.¹⁰⁸

Lenin, of course, did not quote this passage (or the many similar ones) in *The State and Revolution*. Engels, significantly, also linked this to the rise of Social-Democracy in Europe:

For, as I said before, there cannot be any doubt that the ultimate platform of the American working class must and will be essentially the same as that now adopted by the whole militant working class of Europe, the same as that of the German-American Socialist Labor Party.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Hartmut Keil, “The Impact of Haymarket on German-American Radicalism”, *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Spring, 1986), 21

¹⁰⁵ “Engels to Liebknecht, 12 May 1886”, *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 47: 446.

¹⁰⁶ “The Labor Movement in America. Preface to the American Edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*”, *Marx-Engels Collected Works* 26: 435.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond C. Sun, “Misguided Martyrdom: German Social Democratic Response to the Haymarket Incident, 1886-87”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 29, (Spring, 1986)

¹⁰⁸ Engels, 435.

¹⁰⁹ Engels, 440.

As with Marx, the trade unions were mentioned only insofar as they were the base for “the electoral battle” which was clearly considered of utmost importance.¹¹⁰ Engels, in short, advocated the tactics which the IWPA had come to reject.

This position was echoed by other leading Marxists of the time. Ignoring the hysterical denunciations of the SLP against their more successful rival, it should be noted that Karl Marx’s daughter and her husband toured America in late 1886 and neither suggested that the Chicago Anarchists were Marxists. Edward Aveling stated “I tell you that I do not hold the same views as the anarchists, but I should be less than a man if I did not in this huge meeting make it my first business to say that I believe that if those men are hanged it is the *Chicago Times* and *Tribune* that will have hanged them.” His wife concurred: “I am no anarchist... they are going to hang these men, not as murderers, but as anarchists.”¹¹¹ Both were clear on what Marxist tactics were, with Mr. Aveling summarising as follows:

Educate, agitate, organise, form a great labour party, and conquer political power... When you have conquered political power, you must conquer economic power. That is to say, with political power in your hand, you must put an end to this wage system... You have manhood suffrage in this country... Now we have not manhood suffrage in Europe. Your chances are greater than ours.

A position echoed by Mrs. Aveling:

The votes of New York, Chicago and other towns shows you how much you can do. But you must hold together as a party, different from, opposed to all others, one with a distinct platform, and pledged to the cause of labour... your victory is assured. That victory had begun. It began with the 68,000 votes for George, and the 25,000 votes you’ve got here

This was precisely the strategy the IWPA rejected in favour of the one which Bakunin had advocated in the International and which Kropotkin had championed in the pages of *Le Révolté* between 1879 and 1882.

However, their position on the Martyrs was somewhat contradictory, as shown in a later book on American socialism based on their tour. They began with the usual Marxist position on “anarchism”:

It is hardly necessary to say that, as Socialists, we are not Anarchists, and are, of necessity, entirely opposed to the methods and aims of Anarchism. It is true both Anarchist and Socialist attack the present capitalist system. But the Anarchist attacks it from the individualist, conservative, reactionary point of view, the Socialist from the communist, progressive, revolutionary standpoint. The two ‘schools’ – if the one can be called a school which has no definite programme, no clear teaching – have, in fact, nothing in common.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Engels, .437.

¹¹¹ “Lecture on 8 November 1886”, *Knights of Labor* (Chicago), 4 December 1886.

¹¹² Edward & Eleanor Marx-Aveling, *The Working-Class Movement in America* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1891), 166-7.

The working classes, they asserted, “were as intensely opposed as any Socialist could be” to the “teachings – the avowed teachings – of the eight men sentenced”.¹¹³ No attempt was made to explain how the Martyrs can have “teachings” *and* “no definite programme, no clear teachings”.

This suggests that they had not familiarised themselves with the ideas of the anarchism at all, as shown when they contradict themselves:

it must be borne in mind that well-nigh every word spoken by the chief defendants at the Chicago trial... could be indorsed by Socialists; for they there preached, not Anarchism, but Socialism.¹¹⁴

What is it to be? Either their ideas are “individualist, conservative, reactionary” or they are Socialist. They cannot be both. Perhaps it is simply the case they bothered to read the defendants’ trial speeches and not *The Alarm* or any other anarchist journal?

The differences between the Anarchist and the Marxist are not down to one being a socialist and the other not (as both are, albeit one is libertarian and the other authoritarian), it is down to the tactics used and what is considered as being *genuine* socialism.

As regards the former, the Marx-Avelings suggested, the “Socialist believes in organisation; he believes in political action, in the seizure of political power by the working class as the only means of attaining that complete economic emancipation which is the final aim.”¹¹⁵ This is only true if you think that Marxism is the only form of socialism. Yet Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta all called themselves socialists while rejecting that definition – other than “believes in organisation”, of course.

That is strategy. What of the goal, what of the vision of socialism? Even here there are differences. Mr. Aveling gave a telling example of Marxist socialism:

Your post-office, a great and immense institution is worked, by whom? By the community, for the benefit of the community. That is socialism... you have already a socialistic institution, the post-office.¹¹⁶

Lenin in 1917 mentioned that a “witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the postal service an example of the socialist economic system” and commented that this “is very true.”¹¹⁷ So commonplace was this example in Marxist circles that in 1896 an anarchist newspaper bemoaned its use when a “State Socialist exhausts all the arguments he knows of in combating the theories of Anarchy” as if “that settles it”.¹¹⁸ Another Marxist, against Lucy Parsons, “advocated state control of the means of production and distribution by a ‘socialist’ political machine. He was interested in working through the electoral process to achieve state power, and he wanted the respect of the establishment”¹¹⁹

The use of this example showed that Marxists did not think workers’ control of production as being an essential condition for socialism and so Anarchists rightly argued that Marxism was

¹¹³ Marx-Aveling, 181

¹¹⁴ Marx-Aveling, 169-70.

¹¹⁵ Marx-Aveling, 168.

¹¹⁶ “Lecture on 8 November 1886”, *Knights of Labor* (Chicago), 4 December 1886.

¹¹⁷ “The State and Revolution”, *The Lenin Anthology* (New York: Princeton University, 1975), 345.

¹¹⁸ “Look at the Post Office!”. *The Firebrand*, 27 December 1896.

¹¹⁹ Ashbaugh, 174.

just state-capitalism. Unsurprisingly, the Chicago anarchists had also not been impressed by this example:

The post office... is the well-known sanctuary of office brokerage and corruption... From experience of the State socialistic tendency on a small scale, we may infer how it would work upon a great [one]. It would at once create a swarming army of officeholders, that is, so many more non-producers, for the rest of us to support. It would create a corresponding multitude of office-seekers, as if we had not far too many of them already. It would entail on all branches of business and trade the slowness, clumsiness, inefficiency and corruption which always characterize officialism... under no form of government can the people really be the masters... the evil consequences of State socialism... would *not* follow from anarchistic socialism¹²⁰

What was the anarchist alternative? As noted above, unions would seize the means of production and workers' associations would run industry. To quote a Bolshevik historian, "the Verviers Congress... decided that it was necessary to realise collectivity of property, 'that is to say the taking possession of social capital by groups of workers' – this being obviously an anarchist move, and not a socialist [i.e., Marxist] one at all."¹²¹ This was the perspective with which the Bolsheviks undermined the factory committees and workers' control after they seized power, instead centralising industry – as urged by the *Communist Manifesto* – in the hands of the State and so handing it over to the bureaucracy who, as a new ruling class, exploited and oppressed the wage-workers instead of the bourgeoisie.

To summarise, the IWPA rejected Marxism in both tactics ("political action") and goals (state centralisation and control). What "Marxism" it may have expressed was either a legacy in terminology from when some of its leading members were Marxists or simply a reflection of ideas which anarchism shares with Marxism (but which Marxists seem unaware of).

Was the IWPA a "synthesis" of Anarchism and Marxism?

In what can only be considered as an improvement, Staughton Lynd and Andrej Grubacic claimed that "Haymarket anarchists and the so-called 'Chicago Idea'" was an historical example of a "synthesis between anarchism and Marxism". The "so-called Haymarket anarchists" took the "need for a fusion of anarchism and Marxism for granted and did their best to create it before their untimely deaths", referencing Green's book.¹²² This "synthesis" was defined in these terms:

What is Marxism? It is an effort to understand the structure of the society in which we live so as to make informed predictions and to act with greater effect. What is anarchism? It is the attempt to imagine a better society and insofar as possible to "prefigure," to anticipate that society by beginning to live it out, on the ground, here and now.

Isn't it perfectly obvious that these two orientations are both needed, that they are like having two hands to accomplish the needed task of transformation?¹²³

¹²⁰ C.L. James, "Anarchy", *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis*, 160-1.

¹²¹ Stekloff, 337

¹²² Staughton Lynd and Andrej Grubacic, *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism and Radical History* (Oakland: PM Press, 2008), 11, 13.

¹²³ Lynd and Grubacic, 12.

This is a strange claim given that anarchists have developed theories to help understand capitalism and how it operates. The notion that only Marxists have done that is simply untenable. It implies that anarchists act while Marxists think, which may be how Marxists view the matter but it simply is false as there is a substantial body of anarchist theory on how capitalism and the state operates. That Marxists cannot be bothered to read it is not our fault. This is not to say that Anarchism cannot utilise aspects of Marxist theory – such as its critique of capitalism – but that cannot be equated to a “synthesis”.

In terms of what anarchism can apparently bring to Marxism, this is very much against the Marxist tradition. Marxists from Marx and Engels onwards have dismissed – mocked – the idea that we should “prefigure” (i.e., apply) our ideas of a better world within the movements fighting the current one – the underlying assumption seems to be that centralised, hierarchical bodies are more efficient as shown by the capitalist regime. It is not explained why mimicking the structures forged to secure minority rule, oppression and exploitation can be used to end them – and the experience of such parties shows that it does not.

It gets worse as Lynd suggests anarchism is merely anti-state:

“anarchism” is an inadequate term to describe what the new movement, or movements, affirm. Like the Haymarket anarchists, like the IWW, those who travel long distances to confront the capitalists of the world at their periodic gatherings, are not only opposed to “the state.” They are equally opposed to capitalism, the wage system, and corporate imperialism.¹²⁴

Yet anarchists have always been opposed to capitalism. Indeed, we have been so before Marxism existed: the first book by a self-proclaimed anarchism was Proudhon’s *What is Property?* (the *Communist Manifesto* repeated its analysis of capital without acknowledgement while insulting its author). Since then, anarchists have presented an interwoven critique of both capitalism and the State, analysing their origins and workings while building movements which aimed to abolish both. In short, anarchism is “anti-state”, but it has always been the anti-state wing of *the socialist movement*.

Yes, indeed, the Haymarket anarchists opposed capitalism and sought to confront the capitalists of their time but that was because anarchism is a school of socialism. In doing so they drew upon Marx’s critique of political economy but then so did Bakunin and no one has suggested that he produced a “synthesis” of Anarchism and Marxism.

Conclusions

As can be seen, claims made about Chicago Anarchists’ non-Anarchism rest on ignorance of anarchism and its history. Yes, the Chicago Anarchists called themselves socialists – as did Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and a host of other anarchists well-known or not. Yes, they waved the red flag – but before, during and after this period anarchists across the globe used this symbol of socialism. Yes, the Chicago anarchists embraced class struggle and the need for working class organisation, as did Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Goldman and the mainstream of the anarchist movement. Yes, a few communist-anarchists embraced terrorism – as did adherents of other theories – and distained working in unions but this were positions Kropotkin – for

¹²⁴ Lynd and Grubacic, 19.

example – combated in the early 1880s and afterwards. As such, support for collective action in the labour movement is not somehow anti-anarchist and it is not (and it is staggering that this needs to be mentioned) exclusively “Marxist” – indeed, the class struggle and the labour movement were not conjured up the writings of two German philosophy students.¹²⁵ Yes, they embraced a version of the labour theory of value and argued that wage-labour resulted in oppression and exploitation, a position expounded by Proudhon before Marx and embraced by Bakunin and even if later anarchists rejected aspects or all of the former, they still held to the latter.

Likewise, the ignorance of Marxists regarding their own tradition plays its part. The desire to distance Marx and Engels from the Social-Democracy they so encouraged makes for a distorted perspective – not least for Leninists who think that Marx and Engels had no illusions in terms of the power of the vote in a bourgeois state. They falsely project backwards the Leninist revision of Marxism to the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, if the likes of Ashbaugh, Nelson, Green and Le Blanc are correct then the following people are wrong: the Haymarket Martyrs, other members of the IWPA like Lucy Parsons and Lizzie and William Holmes, Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta and other anarchists across the world. To these can be added: Frederick Engels, Edward Aveling, Eleanor Aveling-Marx and the American SLP, amongst other State Socialists who, as would be expected, did not understand anarchism but also apparently did not really understand Marxism either as they failed to see the IWPA as Marxists.

It is possible, of course. Conventional wisdom can be wrong – what is accepted as “true” can be at odds with the facts (see many of the myths associated with anarchism spread by its opponents) and should be challenged and exposed. This is not the case here and rather than a debunking rooted in a clear understanding of the facts, we get assertions based on unspecified assumptions – for none of these authors even bother to specify what anarchism *is* in order to show why the IWPA does not meet that definition. Indeed, a clear understanding of anarchist theory and history would show precisely why it was anarchist even if its members retained some terminology and perspectives from their Marxist pasts.

Correcting mis-readings of ideas and movements is important for these all too easily become accepted truths through repetition. Some of these mis-readings are more innocent than others but all flow from an unwillingness to take anarchism seriously as a theory and movement. As such, debunking such claims are worthwhile if time consuming, for false assertions cannot be truly refuted without evidence. The political evolution of members of the IWPA from Marxism to Anarchism is worth recounting – particularly as it allows us to debunk myths about both. It also allows us to quote their writings and make their ideas better known today, so allowing us to learn from their experiences and seek to apply these lessons in today’s much changed but still capitalist world.

¹²⁵ It should be noted that by favouring “political action”, Marx and Engels undermined the collective nature of the labour movement by focusing on a bourgeois, individualistic strategy – there no one more isolated than a person in a voting booth nor more dependent on leaders acting for them.

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