

Making history or just repeating it?

Anarcho

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Contents

0 Marx out of 10	3
An alternative	3
Building the new world while fighting this one	4

Karl Marx once wrote that history repeated itself, first time as tragedy, second time as farce. The left in Britain seem intent on proving him right. How else can we explain the attempts to create yet another new party to challenge New Labour at the polls?

It is like 1997 has been decreed as year zero for Marxists. The history of the labour movement is happily ignored while the SWP and assorted other sects repeat the tactics which worked so unsuccessfully in the past. Blair did not appear from nowhere. He is just the latest in a long line of Labour politicians who, upon gaining office in the capitalist state, promoted capitalist policies.

This is not surprising. The state is the instrument by which minority classes use to maintain their power and privileges. It can never used to destroy them. What *is* surprising is that Marxists seem to forget this, urging us to vote for radicals at election time and get outraged when they defend the interests of the few rather than the many.

0 Marx out of 10

This is, of course, not the first time Marxists have urged us to the polls. Marx himself argued working class to take part in bourgeois elections and institutions. The net effect was simply to prove his anarchist opponents right. The “revolutionary” Social Democratic Parties across the world quickly became bureaucratic, top-down and opportunist. Revolutionary rhetoric simply disguised a deeply reformist practice. When the First World War broke out, the bourgeois chickens came home to roost in the “socialist” parties – across the globe, the “socialists” supported their ruling class in the conflict.

One hundred years later, the German Greens followed the same path. They too argued for electioneering combined with direct action. Unsurprisingly, they arrived in the same destination. They became split between a small group who argued for principles and a majority who adjusted to the realities of power. The same sad story of opportunism, bureaucracy and betrayal – exactly the same fate that has befallen Lula in Brazil and radicals elsewhere who thought that their ideas made them immune to the realities of the tactics of parliamentarianism.

Anarchists were not surprised by this. We accurately predicted this outcome of socialist tactics. What we did not predict was the stubborn persistence of “scientific” socialists in ignoring the evidence of history. You would think that over a hundred years of using a tactic which does not work would make them think twice about it but no. They want to prove Marx right, even it is only by providing the “farce.”

An alternative

Today, just over a hundred years since the formation of the Labour Party, we have a choice. Do we repeat the mistakes of the past or do we learn the lessons of history? Is there an alternative?

Yes – direct action, solidarity and self-management. We think that only working class control of their own struggles can create working class control of society. This means pursuing a policy of extra-parliamentarian struggle. It means waging the class war using federations of community and workplace assemblies.

Anarchists look to the basic mass meeting of workers at their place of work and people in their neighbourhoods as the foundation of organisation and the source of labour’s power. These meetings are co-ordinated by means of federations of elected, mandated and recallable delegates.

Unlike the parliamentarian, the delegate must carry out the wishes of their electors otherwise they are kicked out and replaced by someone who will obey the people. This is organisation from the bottom upwards.

Through direct action, people create, conduct, organise and manage their own struggle. We do not hand over to others our task of self-liberation. We become used to managing our own affairs, creating alternative, libertarian, forms of social organisation which can become a force to resist the state and the bosses and win reforms. It creates organs of self-activity which, to use Bakunin's words, are "creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself." Workers' control of struggle is the only way that workers' control of their own lives and society becomes a possibility. And it builds the organisations that can achieve it — popular assemblies, workers' councils, factory committees, and so on.

Unlike Marxist calls for a new electoral activity. The idea that socialists standing for elections somehow prepares for revolution is simply wrong — it only prepares people for following leaders. It does not encourage the self-activity, self-organisation, direct action and mass struggle required for a social revolution. There is nothing more isolated, atomised and individualistic than voting. It is the act of one person in a closet by themselves. Voting creates no alternative organs of working class power. And Marxists slander anarchists as being "individualists"!

What of the right? Will anti-parliamentarianism let them in? As Blair shows, electing the lesser evil does not work. We need to organise in our communities and workplaces. That is where **our** power lies, that is where we can create a real alternative. Unlike politicians, the mass of the population cannot be bought off and if they are willing and able to resist then they can become a power second to none. By creating a network of self-managed community and workplace organisations we can impose by direct action that which politicians can never give us from Parliament. And **only** such a movement can stop the attacks upon us by whoever gets into office. A government (left or right) which faces a mass movement based upon direct action and solidarity will always think twice before making unjust decisions.

Building the new world while fighting this one

Anarchists see the framework of an anarchist society coming from the class struggle and the process of revolution itself. Anarchy is not a jump into the dark but rather a natural development of the struggle for freedom under capitalism. It will be created from below up by as working class people start to resist oppression and exploitation. The class struggle transforms those involved as well as society and creates the organisational structure and people required for a libertarian society.

With that in mind, our alternatives are rooting in building the real organs of working class power in the here and now. That means encouraging a rank and file movement based on the spirit of the wildcat. It means promoting the idea of strikers' assemblies as the decision making bodies in industrial disputes rather than relying on "left-wing" leaders to act for us. It means creating a network of militants who put the needs of the struggle above the recruiting needs of their party or vote gathering. It means investing the resources, time and energy wasted in supporting political parties in building a labour movement run by and for its members. Rather than voting a someone to misrepresent us every four years, we should be creating community organisations which allow people to put real pressure on the state all the time. The anti-poll tax

unions of the early '90s and the assemblies in Argentina and of the Zapatistas today show what is possible.

Building the new world while fighting this one will be much harder than electioneering and letting a few leaders act for us. But it is worth it. Do we really want to look back in a few decades time wondering why the “new” party of labour has become as bad as the old one?

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