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In science, the validity of a theory is generally proven by its predictive abilities. A theory suggests certain outcomes and if those predictions come to be then it becomes accepted as valid. Strangely, while proclaiming itself "scientific socialism" (something, like so much else, appropriated from Proudhon), Marxists refuse to apply that criteria to the socialist movement.

Wisely, for Marxism has simply proven Bakunin's analysis of it correct. Against Marx, he argued, firstly, that socialists standing for election would produce reformism, *not* revolution, and, secondly, that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be simply a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Both came to pass.

If the left were actually scientific, Marxism would be dead and those few left would be viewed like creationists or, at best, defenders of Lamarckism. Sadly, though, Marxists eschew Marx's materialism and scientific pretensions in favour of confirming his passing remark that history repeats itself, first time as tragedy and second time as farce. So we find Marxists continuing to advocate partic-

ipation in elections and the so-called workers' state as if the last 150-odd years have never happened. A truly farcical situation.

So while Marxists ignore it, the awkward fact is that Bakunin was right. This makes *A Critique of State Socialism* is a very welcome reprint, albeit an extremely expensive one. Originally published by Cienfuegos Press in 1981, I fondly remember getting the B Books 1986 reprint when I just became an anarchist in 1988. It combines extracts from Bakunin's critique of Marx and other state socialists with wonderfully witty illustrations by Richard Warren. Joe King provides an excellent short introduction to Bakunin's life and ideas.

Do not be put-off by the extremely dated cover (the *New Labour Party* and *SDP* being stooges of a Soviet invasion of a revolutionary Britain which Thatcher had fled in 1984!) this comic is a masterpiece of relevant political polemic. Bakunin's analysis of socialism, both libertarian and authoritarian, is combined with wonderful cartoons by Warren Richards and appropriate actual quotes from the likes of Marx, Engels and Lenin to illustrate Bakunin's arguments. Bakunin's words, it should be noted, come from different sources – 1867's *Federalism, Socialism and Anti-Theologism* (on the history of socialism) and 1873's *Statism and Anarchy* (on Marxism). Humour is well used to underline the serious points being made.

It starts with Bakunin sketching the origins of socialism, starting with French Revolution, then moves onto the conspiracies of Baboeuf and Blanqui ("So where are the masses?" "Maybe we kept the conspiracy *too* secret…?") before passing through the (highly regulated) visions of utopians like Fourier and Saint-Simon ("Fancy sneaking out to the pub tonight?" asks one bored member of a Fourierist perfect community). This account is short and the bulk of the book, rightly, deals with Marx and Lenin.

There is such a wealth of material it is difficult to summarise. Warren's pictures (14) showing the differences between peaceful socialists ("we'll have to do it bit by bit. so you may not notice it to begin with…"), revolutionary state socialists ("of course, *we''ll*

preciate the contributions of others to the socialist project and see when Marx appropriated *their* ideas into his own (usually, as with Proudhon, without mentioning the source – but that is another issue).

So, all in all, a classic polemic which every anarchist should have in order to give to any new recruit to or disillusioned member of a Leninist Party – although it is so good you may not get it back again! The only negative against it is its price – £12 seems excessive for the size of the book. However, if you can afford it then please buy it (alternatively, it would make an excellent present to give or receive!) as you will not be disappointed.

A Critique of State Socialism
Michael Bakunin and Richard Warren
Christie Books
£12

have to give the orders for a while…") and anarchists ("Admittedly, it might take a long time for this to happen…') is my personal favourite. This is closely followed by his skilful summary (21) of how easy it could be for Lenin to rationalise centralisation of power from the proclaimed dictatorship of the workers and peasants, via the party, to his own (and, sadly, it *does* echo actual Bolshevik rationales). It would also be remiss not to mention Warren's contrast (23) between Lenin in 1917 and after, utilising his actual quotes (along with the suggestion that Lenin got his 1917 visions from Bakunin and Kropotkin!).

However, pointing out just one page amidst so many wonderful ones is hard – as can be seen. Ironically, given the devastating nature of this critique it could be argued that Warren gives the Trotskyists an easy time of it. He concentrates on Lenin, so there is no quoting of Trotsky's arguments for party dictatorship. Given that these span two decades and were expressed before, during *and* after the rise of Stalin this is a rich source of embarrassing quotes Warren could have utilised – and libertarians really should be aware of! Similarly, Trotsky's classic *Terrorism and Communism* is also good for quotes but is not used here.

As well as critique, the libertarian alternative is also presented. Proudhon covered in two pages (10–1) although I have to object to Proudhon's mutualism being described as having "the individual, not the collective, as the basic social unit" (Bakunin is quoted, correctly, stating that "Proudhon's socialism was based upon individual and collective freedom"). Makhno and his struggle against white and red dictatorship gets 3 pages (30–2), followed by one on Kronstadt. (33). The Spanish Revolution, plus the Communist's counter-revolutionary role, gets 3 pages (36–7 and 45) and it sums up the CNT's mistake well ("We didn't seize political power. But neither did we *destroy* it!!"). Zapata in Mexico (44), Hungary 56 and other revolts against Stalinism (46–7) rightfully get mentions.

Of course, as with any short critique, much is left out. For example, it does not mention directly that Bakunin recognised the

necessity of organising a federated militia to defend a revolution but the account of the Makhnovists should indicate this to anybody with basic common sense. Similarly, while Bakunin is quoted speculating that the peasantry might be "subjected" to a "new domination" by the proletariat when it is "the ruling class" (33) it helps immensely to know that when Bakunin wrote this in 1873 the proletariat was very much the minority of the working classes in Western Europe (as it was in 1917 in Russia). So to call for, as Marx did, for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" was to argue for rule by a minority, *not* the majority.

Moreover, this quote does distract slightly from the real focus and power of Bakunin's critique, namely that even the proletariat would be ruled by a few party leaders under this statist regime – because of the nature of state structures. As Joe King summarises, "Bakunin understood that government is the means by which a minority rules" based on "the concentration of authority in a few hands." The state and to be abolished to "place power in the hands of the masses through their own federation of voluntary organisations." As Bakunin argued, the so-called workers' state would be "a ridiculous contradiction" as the state "will always be an institution of domination and exploitation" of the many by the few. (27) When "the whole people govern" then "there can be no State" (36–7) and so anarchists urge "the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards." (46)

Needless to say, the die-hard Leninist will not let this excellent little book dent his faith. Much muttering while be voiced on how Warren ignores the "objective circumstances" facing the Bolsheviks – civil war, economic collapse, isolation and so forth. Ironically, this Leninist fixation on "objective circumstances" results in a strange irony – downplaying the importance of Leninist ideology. Logically, this determinism means that the ideas of the leading Bolsheviks (i.e., the people making the decisions) made no impact on the revolution. A strange position to take, to proclaim that you should become a Leninist while also maintaining that your ideology was irrelevant during an apparently "successful" revolution (as if Bolshevik imposition of party dictatorship and state capitalism can be considered a success by non-ideologues!). Still, such contradiction is hardly rare – they also maintain that civil war and economic disruption caused the degeneration of Leninism while Lenin himself proclaimed *both* were inevitable aspects of a revolution!

Worse, the awkward fact is that Bolshevik authoritarianism started *before* the outbreak of the civil war. The Bolsheviks were producing executives *above* the soviets, creating the Cheka, gerrymandering and disbanding soviets, imposing one-man management, repressing strikes and opposition socialists/anarchists, etc. long before revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion in late May 1918. Moreover, Bolshevik ideology and vision of socialism as centralised state-planning made the economic crisis worse *and* destroyed the socialistic tendencies that existed (by, for example, preferring Tsarist state-capitalist economic structures over the factory committees). And so on. In short, ideas matter – particularly the ideology of the ruling elite as this will impact on the decisions made and structures favoured.

The notion that Bolshevik ideology and the centralised top-down structures their ideology preferred had no impact of the development of the revolution simply cannot be maintained once you know the facts. Admittedly, all this would be hard to squeeze into comic format – it is hard enough to summarise in text form (see section H of *An Anarchist FAQ* for details). Suffice to say, this book gives you a taster to the subject matter – and does so in a memorable and extremely enjoyable manner.

Finally, this does not mean we reject everything Marx wrote – Bakunin was, after all, very complementary about Marx's critique of capitalism. It just means that Marx got more wrong than right and that libertarians, not limited by calling our ideas after a dead-guy with a beard, are in a position to appreciate this and incorporate his better ideas in our theories. Just as we do with the likes of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. We are also better placed to ap-