

# **Socialism and Strategy**

**A Libertarian Critique of Leninism**

Anthony Zurbrugg

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## Abstract

This essay criticises ‘Leninism’. It addresses seven points on social change and transformation: change as a broad social movement, and issues of gender, management, authority, the state, the party and the union. It draws on perspectives from various anarchist, syndicalist, feminist, and socialist traditions. It suggests that future socialist movements might well draw on inclusive participatory democratic forms, rather than looking towards reviving some form of a Leninist party.

**Keywords:** *Socialism, Anarchism, Syndicalism, Leninism, Bolshevism, Participation, Self-management.*

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Socialists seeking strategies for a better future have to consider what forms of organisation—now and in the future—may promote a new equitable society. It is natural that they should reconsider which facets of their traditions are useful and worth preserving, and which are not. This text considers some contrasting features of the strategic thinking of particular libertarians and Marxists. It reviews recent contributions by two writers in this area, both advocating an ongoing value for the Leninist tradition: the first by Charles Post, in *Socialist Register 2013*, who suggests that there is a rational core in Leninism<sup>1</sup> and secondly two texts by Paul Blackledge, on Marxism and Anarchism, in *International Socialism*.<sup>2</sup> This text considers the content of socialism and touches on aspects of gender, authority, (trade) unions, parties, and councils. Following Malatesta, it assumes that libertarians are socialists, who look for cooperation:

“when the Socialist Party rests on the terrain of revolution, when workers’ organisations remain organisations of struggle against the bosses, when co-operatives are experiments in workers’ direct management, for the benefit of the collective, in short when socialist institutions remain really socialist, our entire sympathy and co-operation is won thereby. Also because for the moment we cannot by our own efforts alone begin or make the revolution triumph. And because we are convinced that socialism if it is really socialism will necessarily merge itself with anarchism.”<sup>3</sup>

In writing about libertarian thinking it has to be noted that syndicalism and Industrial Unionism took varied forms both in the past and in more recent times,<sup>4</sup> and developed various sets

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Post, ‘What is left of Leninism? New European left parties in historical perspective’ in *The Question of Strategy: Socialist Register 2013*, London: Merlin Press, 2012. (Hereinafter SR 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Blackledge, ‘Marxism and Anarchism’ in *International Socialism*, No. 125, pp 189–206, <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=616>, (hereinafter IS 125); and Paul Blackledge, ‘Anarchism, Syndicalism and Strategy: A reply to Lucien van der Walt’ in *International Socialism*, No. 131, pp 53–80, <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=746&issue=131>, (hereinafter IS 131).

<sup>3</sup> Errico Malatesta, *Umanita Nova*, #38 & #153; 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1920, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1920; quoted and translated from *Errico Malatesta, Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes*, Annency: Groupe 1er Mai, 1982, pp 119; 141–2.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in Spain, the largest libertarian union is the CGT; there are also two syndicalist networks: <http://www.cgt.es>; <http://www.solidaridadobrera.org>; <http://cnt.es>. In Italy, there are a range of base unions: e.g. <http://www.unicobas.it>; <http://www.sdlintercategoriale.it>; <http://www.cub.it>; <http://www.usiait.it>, and <http://www.usi-ait.org>. In France, there are analogues of such bodies, but perhaps the largest alternative centre is <http://www.solidaires.org>.

of priorities in different contexts. Anarchism was even more variegated. For the most part the particular strand of anarchism that is referred to below draws on the anarchist communism of Errico Malatesta and Luigi Fabbri.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever one may think of it, Leninism(s) has some strength. It looks for strategies and seeks clarity as to the way forward; it discusses issues of unity in struggles among working people; it embraces some tactical flexibility allowing for tactics to be modified in the light of circumstance. Before going further one should also recognise that writing about one Leninism—just as much as writing about one anarchism or one syndicalism—is problematic. Bolshevism, to name the party rather than to focus on one man, took many forms: for the most part, early in 1917, it tended to view the revolution that had come in February 1917 as predominantly bourgeois; later in 1917 the stress was for ‘All Power to the Councils’; in 1918 the stress changed to ‘iron discipline’; thereafter, party factions were banned, and those who had taken to heart the clause in the party programme on unions managing the economy were condemned as syndicalists.<sup>6</sup> Over time there were some changes in the contents of the Bolshevisms and Leninisms codified and propagated by the Third International to influence the labour movement in Western Europe and the wider world, but there were also constant themes, not the least of these being the necessity of following the line set by leaders in Moscow.

## Social Revolution or State Revolution

It is sometimes said that there is a libertarian Lenin, and this moment in his thought is represented in *State and Revolution*.<sup>7</sup> A quick glance at it will show that Lenin re-defined some aspects of Marxist theory, but left much else intact. Lenin is famous for redirecting Bolshevik priorities in April 1917. Some six months after the first February revolution he wrote:

“For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly. [And further:] state-monopoly capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no intermediate rungs.”<sup>8</sup>

For the Bolsheviks, large scale industry was the foundation of socialism. This was set out in their party programme. ‘We must promote the painless transition of this obsolete form of production[in the home or on a small scale] into the higher forms of large-scale manufacture.’<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Such thinking is alive in such organisations as the Italian Anarchist-Communist Federation (Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici): <http://www.fdca.it>; and perhaps also in Alternative Libertaire: <http://www.alternativelibertaire.org>.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the Bolshevik party programme see ‘Looking Back: An Afterword,’ in Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, London, Merlin Press, 2007, pp 335ff, esp. 360–3.

<sup>7</sup> ‘There’s a kind of a libertarian Lenin in 1917 with *State and Revolution* and *The April Theses*, and so on.’ Noam Chomsky interviewed by Joe Allen and Phil Gasper, International Socialist Organization; November 3, 1989; <http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/19891103.htm>, (accessed 12.11. 2012)

<sup>8</sup> ‘The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It,’ September 1917, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, Moscow: Progress Publishers, and London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964, pp 362–3. Most Lenin texts may be found on <http://www.marxists.org>.

<sup>9</sup> In Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, London, Merlin Press, 2007, p 19.

Luigi Fabbri condemned a belief that relied only on large scale factory production; in his view according to circumstance, a mixture of large and small scale production was appropriate and decisions in this matter should be taken by the workers concerned.<sup>10</sup> Lenin had set out a strategy involving everyone working for the state as employees of the national state syndicate. He argued in *State and Revolution*:

“At present the [German] postal service is a business organized on the lines of a state-capitalist monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type, in which, standing over the ‘common’ toilers, who are overworked and starved, is the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. We have but to overthrow the capitalists, to crush the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, to smash the bureaucratic machine of the modern state—and we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the ‘parasite,’ a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves...”<sup>11</sup>

Characteristics of the German Post Office deserve to be noticed: particularly that most employees expected respect for their uniform and authority—as ‘Beamte’—state officials. Many ex-soldiers, habituated to obedience and compliance, were employed. Such people may have been accustomed to taking orders. What was on Lenin’s agenda was the promotion of a modern efficient industrial economy, patterned on the model of German capitalism.

Although he talked about checking and accounting by workers, Lenin’s agenda did not prioritise measures to promote workers’ power at work—socialist features desired by many syndicalists, Industrial Unionists and socialists. Between the beginning of the century and 1914, many of those to the left of mainstream social-democracy had a very different vision of socialism than Lenin’s, and looked for a wider agenda. It is worth pausing here and reminding ourselves what was on the agenda of other socialists in this era. Take James Connolly, for example:

“Political institutions are not adapted to the administration of industry. Here is a statement that no Socialist with a clear knowledge of the essentials of his doctrine can dispute. The political institutions of today are simply the coercive forces of capitalist society they have grown up out of, and are based upon territorial divisions of power in the hands of the ruling class in past ages, and were carried over into capitalist society to suit the needs of the capitalist class when that class overthrew the dominion of its predecessors...”

“In short, social democracy, as its name implies, is the application to industry, or to the social life of the nation, of the fundamental principles of democracy. Such application will necessarily have to begin in the workshop, and proceed logically and consecutively upward through all the grades of industrial organization until it reaches the culminating point of national executive power and direction. In other words, social democracy must proceed from the bottom upward, whereas capitalist

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<sup>10</sup> Writing c. 1920–1, in Luigi Fabbri, *Dictature et Revolution*, Paris: Monde Libertaire, 1986, pp 145–7; it should be noted that in these times many more people lived in rural communities than do so now and strategies needed to adjust to this reality.

<sup>11</sup> ‘State and Revolution,’ September 1917. *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp 431–2.

political society is organized from above downward. Social democracy will be administered by a committee of experts elected from the industries and professions of the land; capitalist society is governed by representatives elected from districts, and is based upon territorial division... every fresh shop or factory organized under its banner is a fort wrenched from the control of the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the revolution to be held by them for the workers.”<sup>12</sup>

Connolly’s vision—of workers running industry,<sup>13</sup> and using that economic organisation as a lever to destroy capitalism and create socialism—drew on American traditions of revolutionary Industrial Unionism. Revolutionary Syndicalism had a similar and greater impact than Industrial Unionism in much of Europe and Latin America.

William Paul, of the British Socialist Labour Party, wrote in similar vein: ‘Capitalism cannot be controlled. But it can be destroyed and replaced by a workers’ Industrial Republic.’ He also argues: ‘Industrial Unionism’s most important function is to unite all the workers for the great and glorious task of carrying on the production of wealth under Socialism on behalf of the community. The work of the political weapon is purely destructive, to destroy the capitalist system... Industrial Unionism is the constructive weapon in the coming social revolution.’ Paul continues:

“When the revolutionary working class captures the State, when it overthrows Capitalism, it will not, like all previous revolutionary classes, use the State to enforce its will upon either a subject or an enslaved class. Since the working class is both an enslaved and a subject class, and since there is no lower class in society, its emancipation will mean the emancipation of all classes. The triumph of the proletarian revolution will mean true economic and political freedom; it will mean the abolition of all classes and propertied conflicts. The revolutionary Socialist denies that State ownership can end in anything other than a bureaucratic despotism. We have seen why the State cannot democratically control industry. Industry can only be democratically owned and controlled by the workers electing directly from their own ranks industrial administrative committees. Socialism will be fundamentally an industrial system; its constituencies will be of an industrial character. Thus those carrying on the social activities and industries of society will be directly represented in the local and central industrial councils of social administration. In this way the powers of such delegates will flow upwards from those carrying on the work and conversant with the needs of the community. When the central administrative industrial committee meets it will represent every phase of social activity. Hence the capitalist political or geographical State, will be replaced by the industrial administrative committee of Socialism. The transition from the one; social system, to the other will be the social revolution. The political State throughout history has meant the government of men by ruling classes; the Republic of Socialism will be the government of industry administered on behalf of the whole community. The former meant the

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<sup>12</sup> In Ken Coates & Tony Topham, *Workers’ Control*, London: Panther, 1970, pp 10–14.

<sup>13</sup> The term warrenning is used by E.P. Thompson, ‘The Peculiarities of the English,’ in E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London, Merlin Press, 1978, pp 281.

economic and political subjection of the many; the latter will mean the economic freedom of all—it will be, therefore, a true democracy.”<sup>14</sup>

In these times Syndicalist railway workers concluded that they did not want to be employees of a state run company, but instead wanted to run the railways for themselves.<sup>15</sup> They saw no advantage of being exploited by one big state-owned company as opposed to being exploited by several capitalist companies. In the syndicalist vision of a socialist future, a railway syndicate would run the railways—and this syndicate, like others, would co-ordinate its activities in conjunction with other workplace and community associations. Power was to be spread through a co-operative self-managed network.

Pier Carlo Masini<sup>16</sup> wrote of socialist transformation in Italy and the role of the factory council—in contrast to the union—in these terms:

“In the first place: instead of developing in the worker the mentality of the wage-earner, it promotes the exploration of a [new] consciousness, that of a producer—with all those consequences that follow: in the fields of learning and psychology. Secondly, the factory council educates and trains workers in management; day after day it brings to them useful aspects of running a business. In consequence of these two new facts, even the most modest and marginal workers immediately understand that the conquest of the factory is no longer a magical chimera, or a confusing hypothesis, but the result of their own liberation. So, in the eyes of the masses, expropriation loses mythical contours, assumes precise features and becomes immediately evident.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus these councils represented a real, albeit partial, prefiguration of socialist society even within the bounds of capitalism. Such thinking contrasts with the Leninist focus on accounting and control that was to prevail after October 1917 in Russia.

Before the start of the civil war in the summer of 1918, Lenin conceived of socialism in terms of changes in ‘politics,’ but not so much in terms of changes in ‘economics’ or ‘society.’ In his view the revolution was compatible with forms of monopoly capitalism, made to serve a new polity, and with managerial power. In his view—a view in conflict with many radical and left socialists in Germany itself—German society and economy, with authoritarian and hierarchical features, accentuated more than ever by the war was ‘one half of socialism.’<sup>18</sup> Some six months after the second, October revolution, he wrote that world revolution

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<sup>14</sup> William Paul, *The State: Its Origin and Function*, Edinburgh: Proletarian Publishing, 1974, pp 157–8, 196–200. [First published, 1917].

<sup>15</sup> E.g. ‘Railways to the Railwaymen’ headline in *The Syndicalist*, in January 1912, [Facsimile reprint], Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Italian historian, 1923–1998.

<sup>17</sup> Pier Carlo Masini, ‘Anarchistes et communistes dans le mouvement des Conseils a Turin, premier apres-guerre rouge 1919–1920’ in *Autogestion et Socialisme*, No. 26–7, March-June 1974; see also <http://kropot.free.fr/Masini-ConseilsTurin.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> These views may be contrasted with texts by Bordiga, who was to become the leader of the Italian Communist Party, also available on the internet. Interestingly, experience of state direction of industry in the First World War had led German radicals to redefine ‘socialism.’ Socialism involved conscious workers’ self-administration of their work. Pannekoek concluded: ‘Nationalization of enterprises is not socialism, socialism is the force of the proletariat.’ 27<sup>th</sup> May 1917, Bremer Burger-Zeitung, quoted in Serge Bricanier, *Pannekoek and the Workers’ Councils*, St Louis (Mo.): Telos Press, 1978, p 143.

“has given birth in 1918 to two unconnected halves of socialism existing side by side like two future chickens in the single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany and Russia have become the most striking embodiment of the economic, the productive and the socio-economic conditions for socialism, on the one hand, and the political conditions on the other.”<sup>19</sup>

My contention is that although Leninism—as compared to the socialism of the Second International—did re-define ‘politics’ insofar as Lenin endorsed the construction of a new state, his focus on the state and party neglected ‘economics’ and forces that were already pressing for self-managed socialism in the workplace. In my view, there were large elements of continuity between the Kautskyite and the Leninist conceptions of social-democracy. In each case, change was expected to come through the mechanism of the state. Neither challenged the gendered division of labour; neither prioritised empowering workers in the workplace. The relations and class identities of operatives and managers, family-carers and absent husbands were barely challenged. New states were created, pre-capitalist social features were abolished, new legal rights were legislated, but the work of developing non-patriarchal socialist relations was scarcely begun. Such Marxisms were no model for change in times past. A failure to analyse their limitations is a disservice to the socialism of the present and future.

## Gender

One may also trace continuities between the politics of the Bolsheviks and the politics of German Social-Democracy in the area of gender relations. A popular exposition of the SDP programme noted: ‘The household of the working man suffers whenever his wife must help to earn the daily bread.’<sup>20</sup> This discourse aspired to the equality of men and women, but framed thinking in terms of the family and household belonging to the male of the species, with women being ‘naturally’ tied to work in the home; such a framework undermined commitments to equality.

The programme of the Bolshevik party expressed commitments to the equality of individuals regardless of factors of sex, race, religion or nationality. It was recognised that it was easy to create rights on paper, and less easy to make equality real. *The ABC of Communism* notes of woman that ‘she has to devote so much time to housekeeping...’<sup>21</sup> Lenin remarked that ‘very few husbands, not even the proletarians, think of how much they could lighten the burdens and worries of their [sic] wives, or relieve them entirely, if they lent a hand in this “women’s work.”’<sup>22</sup> But the thought that men should take an equal share in family responsibilities found no place in the party programme.

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<sup>19</sup> Lenin, ‘Left Wing Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality,’ May 1918, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, Moscow: Progress Publishers, and London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965, p 340; Lenin judged that the general situation was unchanged three years later and this passage was reprinted in Lenin’s pamphlet of May 1921, ‘The Tax in Kind,’ *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, pp 329–365.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (Erfurt Programme), Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1901, p 26.

<sup>21</sup> Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, London, Merlin Press, 2007, p 10 and pp 177ff.

<sup>22</sup> Clara Zetkin, ‘My Recollections of Lenin,’ in *Lenin, On the Emancipation of Women*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p 114.



Work was conceptualised as waged work, leaving aside, or downplaying recognition of unwaged work as real work.<sup>23</sup> The future of gender relations was predicated on the development of the collectivisation of ‘housework’—collective facilities for living, cleaning, childcare, eating, etc.; but there was no challenge to the gendered division of labour. It was thought that collectivisation would allow women space to ‘interest herself in all those matters which now interest the proletarian man.’<sup>24</sup> Women would be free when collectives assumed housework responsibilities; meanwhile, there was no effort to encourage men to take on equal family responsibilities or to challenge prejudices that justified inequality in the family. Collectives were conceived of not on a small or intimate scale, drawing in the energies of neighbours, but more on a factory scale, receiving state funding and functioning as efficient industrial units.

The new Bolshevik state that emerged after 1917 had one woman, Alexandra Kollontai, amongst its leaders and rapidly changed laws on marriage, divorce and abortion. There was a rapid expansion in the provision of nurseries and children’s homes. But there was no independent and autonomous women’s organisation, with representation in the leading bodies of the state that could fight for the development of collective facilities. In the network of organisation that developed after 1917, little or no power was located amongst women and in the community. Insofar as local initiatives were not encouraged, new centres of social power were not promoted. There was little pressure building up to promote the redistribution of scarce resources. Subsequently, in the era of the New Economic Policy, there was little social organisation with a capacity and strength that could be mobilised to oppose cuts in community services that had been promoted in the era of war communism. Thereafter, in the era of Stalin’s power, family law was also revised.

Socialists have looked towards a future with economic and political freedom. Marx famously thought of socialism in terms of his ability to be a hunter, a fisherman and a critical critic.<sup>25</sup> But this vision left Mrs. Marx holding the baby and taking care of the family. In such thinking socialism was ready to envisage changing some aspects of the division of labour in the future, but, being somewhat blind in respect of gender inequalities, it had thus far failed to develop the categories that might facilitate challenging patriarchal relations. Lenin could say: ‘We want no separate organisations of communist women! She who is a communist belongs as a member just as he who is a Communist.’ Bolshevism derived its organisation principles from its ideological conceptions.<sup>26</sup> Blind or par-blind ideological conceptions—failing to recognise that there was another vector of oppression beyond capitalism—obstructed understandings of the need to confront issues of patriarchy and obstructed the development of spaces in which women might organise autonomously.

There were challenges to patriarchal thinking in these times. In the Ukraine, libertarians in the *Nabat* (Tocsin) youth organisation called for a struggle against all forms of oppression, including: ‘A struggle against the existing family, which has turned us into deceitful hypocrites

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<sup>23</sup> Such issues were discussed in ‘Unwaged work within capitalism,’ in a supplement of *Libertarian Communist*, (Libertarian Communist Group), 1979.

<sup>24</sup> *The ABC*, p 179. In Bolshevik thinking proletarian soldiers and metal workers were seen as highly conscious, unskilled women were seen as highly unconscious. Respect, or disrespect, flowed from this.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970, p 53; written in 1845–6.

<sup>26</sup> Lenin’s thinking as recorded in Clara Zetkin, ‘My Recollections of Lenin,’ *ibid.*, p 110.

nourished on the poison of corruption.<sup>27</sup> Alexandra Kollontai nibbled away on the fringes of Bolshevik thinking, and wrote about patrimony and free love; love that rejected possessiveness. Lenin, however, rejected such thinking. He believed that in current circumstances, radical talk, talk of free love especially, was ridiculous. 'Nowadays all thoughts of Communist women, of working women, should be centred on the proletarian revolution, which will lay the foundation, among other things, for the necessary revision of material and sexual relations. Just now we must really give priority to problems other than the forms of marriage among Australia's aborigines, or marriage between brother and sister in ancient times.' In his view the priorities of German proletarian women should lie in struggles around the problems of Soviets, or of the Versailles Treaty and their impact on the lives of women and not on sexual issues.<sup>28</sup> Lenin rejected promiscuity in terms of drinking dirty water—and his images seem to arise from a disrespect of non-monogamous women—failing to condemn men who do not embrace monogamy. Thus radicals such as Kollontai, who wanted to discuss free love, were disrespected. Prevailing Bolshevik thinking was ill-prepared or inimical to advancing beyond civil and legal equality, and permitting abortion.<sup>29</sup>

Accomplishments similar to those made by the early Bolshevik government were also achieved in the short time that anarchist ministers participated in the Spanish government in 1936 to 1937, when Frederica Montseny was the only woman minister. Here too social attitudes were less easy to change. In Spain the sight of women dressed in blue overalls and carrying rifles was something extraordinary. A libertarian women's organisation—Mujeres Libres—spread, building a membership of some 20,000. Nevertheless women were very often expected to carry on doing those tasks that the gendered division of labour assigned to them: cooking, cleaning and childcare. As in Russia, union officials and leaders were male, even when the majority of union members were female. Syndicalist movements 'naturally' focussed on organising waged workers. Unwaged workers, and the recognition of unwaged work, did not fit easily into such a movement. This was a pattern that some women began to challenge. It was argued that: 'Revolutionary woman on the other hand must fight on two fronts: firstly for her external struggle for freedom, a struggle in which, thanks to common ideals and a common cause, she has men as allies, but in addition she must struggle for her interior freedom, a freedom enjoyed by men since ages past. In this struggle, women are on their own.'<sup>30</sup> Such challenges and changes were seldom welcomed. Mujeres Libres—Free Women—came together as a new and independent organisation, something not structurally bound within the CNT or FAI. Mujeres Libres sought to work with these bodies and with the Libertarian Youth (FIJL). Although it received occasional subsidies, it did not receive parity of recognition as an equal with the CNT, FAI and FIJL. Nevertheless Mujeres Libres did have something that Russian women lacked—an autonomous structure deciding priorities for itself. In this respect, an anarchist humanism that

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Avrich, Ed., *The Anarchists in The Russian Revolution*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, p 57.

<sup>28</sup> Clara Zetkin, 'My Recollections of Lenin,' p 103.

<sup>29</sup> A contrasting position is: 'No feminism with socialism, no socialism without feminism,' e.g. <http://socialistresistance.org/5443/in-womens-liberation-the-first-step-is-self-consciousness>. 'Socialism and Strategy: A Libertarian Critique of Leninism.' was written in the summer and autumn of 2012, before the events described here: <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/swp-crisis/253-trigger-warning-rape-in-the-swp-a-comrade-s-testimony-and-experience-of-the-disputes-committee>.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Nash, *Femmes Libres: Espagne 1936–1939*, Claix: la pensee sauvage, 1977, p118.

recognised a diversity of forms of oppression permitted diversity in organisation. Despite some opposition, *Mujeres Libres* had some autonomy, and its own space.

Marx and many Marxists thought that communists had an advantage over other socialists in that they could foresee the line of march of the labour movement.<sup>31</sup> Experience showed that the challenge to both genders to share childcare and family responsibilities would take many years to develop and gain recognition. Many progressive thinkers—in all tendencies of socialism—would drag their feet before revising their thinking.<sup>32</sup> Progress came with the autonomous organisation of women and with men accepting that socialism without real gender equality was a contradiction in terms.

## Management

For Lenin, hierarchical and managerial relations were natural to industry: ‘unquestioning subordination to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organised on the pattern of large-scale machine industry. On the railways it is twice and three times as necessary.’<sup>33</sup> For Lenin, as for Engels, authority was natural. But consider for a moment a comment on the running of transport in Catalonia after the July 1936 revolution in Spain, as described at the grass-roots level by one witness:

“Agreement was therefore also permanent between engineers and workers. No engineer could take an important decision without consulting the local Comité, not only because he agreed that responsibility should be shared, but also because often, where practical problems are involved, manual workers have the experience which technicians lack. This was understood by both parties and thereafter, very often when the Comité of the syndicate or a delegate thought up an interesting idea, the specialist engineer would be called in for consultations; on other occasions it was the engineer who proposed the examination of a new idea and in that case manual workers were called in. There was complete collaboration.”<sup>34</sup>

This might suggest that the experience of unqualified workers had a value, and that those with better technical education benefited from that experience. There was a dialogue between those with practical and technical expertise: authority was shared between both, and was not the absolute prerogative of either. In a similar situation Lenin had argued for a reliance on experts: ‘We have bourgeois experts and nothing else.’<sup>35</sup>

In the decade before the First World War, working people expressed a pride in their production when they attached union labels to products; conversely they developed a capacity to sabotage

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<sup>31</sup> ‘theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.’ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964, p 26.

<sup>32</sup> Bakunin once wrote ‘I am truly free only when all people around me—men and women—are equally free.’ Michel Bakounine, ‘Dieu et l’Etat,’ in *Œuvres*, Vol 1, Paris: Stock, 1882, pp 312–313; not all libertarians were as progressive.

<sup>33</sup> Original emphasis, Lenin, reiterating in 1920 arguments from ‘Immediate Tasks’ (1918); *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, 1965, p 475.

<sup>34</sup> Gaston Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, London: Freedom Press, 1975, 1975, p 247. [Also: *Espagne libertaire*; from <http://1libertaire.free.fr/GLeval03.html>]

<sup>35</sup> March-April 1919, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, p 70.

production in order to impose themselves when under attack. Before the revolution Russian trade unions had little capacity to organise; but in parts of Western Europe working people did challenge managerial authority. Such challenges helped promote an understanding that authority might be a social construct, reflecting social norms and experience; indeed it might reflect wider factors, not just in the workplace but also in the field of education and in family life.

In the economic sphere, Lenin's thinking in 1917 and 1918 focused on this agenda:

“Accounting and control—that is the main thing required for ‘arranging’ the smooth working, the correct functioning of the first phase of communist society. All citizens are transformed here into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. All citizens become employees and workers of a single nationwide state ‘syndicate.’ All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equally paid.”<sup>36</sup>

Earlier he wrote:

“When we say: ‘workers’ control,’ always juxtaposing this slogan to dictatorship of the proletariat, always putting it immediately after the latter, we thereby explain what kind of state we mean. The state is the organ of class domination. [...] If it is of the proletariat, if we are speaking of a proletarian state, that is, of the proletarian dictatorship, then workers’ control can become the country-wide, all-embracing, omnipresent, most precise and most conscientious accounting of the production and distribution of goods.

“By a single decree of the proletarian government these employees can and must be transferred to the status of state employees, in the same way as the watchdogs of capitalism like Briand and other bourgeois ministers, by a single decree, transfer railwaymen on strike to the status of state employees.”<sup>37</sup>

‘Accounting and control’ was, in these times, and in his view, the next step in a process of socialist transformation. Businesses and workplaces were to open their books and workers were to check what was going on. Strict records were to be kept of stocks and assets. But this accounting and control was conceived of as a check on managerial power and not as a reversal of the power of management. Management in a particular workplace was not accountable to workers. Even this very limited agenda would be subordinated to the political revolution. Later, in 1920, Lenin would argue that: ‘Democracy is a category proper only to the political sphere.’<sup>38</sup> Lenin says rail workers should by decree be made state employees. It did not occur to Lenin to ask whether railway workers—or other workers—wanted to be state employees.

Earlier Lenin's views on workers' control were quoted from *State and Revolution*. Lenin set out that ‘The state is the organ of class domination.’ The un-stated corollary of this was that class domination—of managers over workers in industry—was compatible with a form of transition to socialism so long as the state was proletarian. Where workers attempted to take over management and began to set up factory committee networks as a forum for industrial planning

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<sup>36</sup> ‘State and Revolution,’ September 1917. *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp 431–2.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?’ October 1917; *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, 1972, pp 106–7.

<sup>38</sup> ‘On the Trade Unions,’ December 1920, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p 26

responsible directly to their constituencies, they came into conflict with this statist and managerialist conception. As we have noted above, Lenin advocated a mixed post-revolutionary society, one where a new polity regulated management but left private ownership of large industry in being, subject to ‘workers’ control’ but not swept away by self-management. This policy held sway in 1917 and in the spring of 1918. It was faced with challenges wherever management fled and wherever ambitious workers—out of necessity—began to take on managerial responsibilities, for example when workers began to seek out supplies to keep their enterprises going.<sup>39</sup> In August 1918 a conference of anarcho-syndicalists condemned the downgrading of the influence of factory committees and saw state-capitalism as a ‘bureaucratic Behemoth’ using capitalist managerial practices.<sup>40</sup> The prevailing conception of ‘socialist’ planning was often hostile and/or disparaging towards grassroots individual initiative, and to small scale artisan production and looked instead to state initiatives on the scale of the factory. The state, however badly it managed the economy, was supposedly socialist, because it could plan things rationally and adopt efficient scientific managerial norms. The Russian Marxism that emerged in symbiosis with the state embraced managerial power and rejected conceptions of workers’ management.

‘Iron discipline’ had become the key slogan spread by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party from the spring of 1918 onwards, designed to consolidate and stabilise the new state.<sup>41</sup> The ranks of officialdom swelled. The earlier emphasis on equality—of pay and conditions—was abandoned.<sup>42</sup> This compromise—and it was regretted by some Bolsheviks—affected the distribution of income and rations, but it only reinforced the powers of management that had always been a constituent part of Lenin’s thinking. After October a new system was burdened with the growth of an unproductive, swollen and unpopular state apparatus. Party members received jobs in this state apparatus, privileged rations, and other perks unavailable to most working people. It was ‘jobs for the boys’ to use popular parlance. Many workers received administrative jobs and became managers: they were co-opted into the new system. ‘most of the party’s members were managers and administrators. Whereas in 1917, Communists actively participated in the assault on such personnel, by 1921 they were often the enforcers of unpopular policies...’<sup>43</sup> By 1920 there were some 150,000 officials in Moscow, and the city had more bureaucrats than workers; St. Petersburg had over 170,000 ‘employees.’<sup>44</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress recognised that many officials were divorced from the masses.<sup>45</sup>

The profile of the economy had changed greatly in the summer of 1918, when events impelled the new state, somewhat reluctantly, to accept the nationalisation of swathes of the economy. If

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<sup>39</sup> For a fuller discussion see Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control*, London: Solidarity, 1970 and David Mandel, *Factory Committees and Workers’ Control in Petrograd in 1917*, Amsterdam: International Institute for Research and Education, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Princeton University Press, 1967, p 191.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Iron discipline and the thorough exercise of proletarian dictatorship against petty-bourgeois vacillation—this is the general and summarising slogan of the moment.’ *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, p 317.

<sup>42</sup> See ‘Looking Back: An Afterword,’ op. cit, p 344; Lenin’s precept of equal wages was abandoned at this time. In the Spanish revolution two sorts of wage differential were often accepted: firstly, in agriculture, wages of men were made equal, but wages of women and children were very often 75 per cent or 50 per cent of the male norm. In industrial collectives wage differentials were also accepted.

<sup>43</sup> William J Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State*, University of Illinois Press, 1990, pp 50–51.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Employees’ designated white-collar office workers. Mary McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd*, Oxford University Press, 1991, p 398.

<sup>45</sup> Mervyn Matthews, *Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974, p 135.

Lenin's prognosis about rungs on ladders had been correct, socialism should have been created in industry and in urban areas as all of Russia's industrial economy came under state control. In the cities everyone was to become a state employee. But—as syndicalists had feared—the nationalisation of ownership in the workplace created not socialism, but a society ruled by managers. Piece-work and Taylorist labour relations were promoted as means to increase labour productivity. The status and authority of management in nationalised industry facilitated the reproduction of unequal relations empowering managers and disempowering workers, rewarding some more than others.

Some Bolsheviks did not take advantage of their authority, working on the principle of share and share alike, but most took advantage of a situation in which there were few checks on the powers of the manager or commissar. The rationing system embodied aspects of privilege, with managers and commissars getting better and more reliable rationed supplies than common folk. In addition, perks were widespread: commissars were recognised by having leather coats, for example. Conversely, those who fell foul of the state were liable to be re-classified and to receive poorer rations. One of the demands of those who rebelled in Kronstadt in 1921 was the ending of this system of privilege. Such feelings were not confined to these rebels. A Moscow conference of metal workers meeting in February 1921 called for the abolition of privileged rations, for greater wage equality, for workers to have a right to transfer to other jobs, for free and democratic elections and for factory committees to have rights for their workers' meeting to determine who should be appointed to factory committee.<sup>46</sup> Unequal rewards and the reversal of the egalitarian ethos of the 1917 revolution were widely resented. Ante Ciliga observed conditions in Moscow in 1928 and commented that by then 'piece-work had been driven up to an output unknown in Western Europe... the Russian workman was so backward, so docile, so incapable of action that this discontentment remained sterile.'<sup>47</sup>

Lenin was half-aware of the limitations of the revolution. By December 1921, worried about the failings of the economy, he declared at the Ninth Congress of Soviets:

“... in the economic field we did very badly. We have to admit this and do better. ‘Stop wagging your tongue’ is what I will say to any trade union worker who puts the general question of whether the trade unions should take part in production. It would be better to give me a practical reply to the question and tell me (if you hold a responsible position, are a man in authority, a Communist Party or a trade union worker) where you have organised production well, how many years it took you to do it, how many people you have under you—a thousand or ten thousand.”<sup>48</sup>

Lenin understood the reality of Party and union officials having authority but the reality that these new relations of power were oppressive escaped him. In Lenin's thinking, the power of the manager was acceptable because the manager was in turn subordinated to a new state, a state in which working people supposedly had power. At the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, in 1920, he argued: ‘The prime thing is the question of property. As soon as the question of property was settled practically, the domination of the class was assured.’<sup>49</sup> Lenin drew on Engels who wrote: ‘The

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<sup>46</sup> Frederick I Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1968, p 243; Jonathan Aves, *Workers Against Lenin*, London: Tauris, 1996, pp 130–136.

<sup>47</sup> Ante Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma*, London: Ink Links, 1979, pp 45–6.

<sup>48</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, 1965, pp 173–4.

<sup>49</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p 456.

proletariat seizes the state power and to begin with transforms the means of production into state property. But it thus puts an end to itself as the proletariat, it thus puts an end to all class differences and class antagonisms, and thus also to the state as the state.<sup>50</sup> Trotsky argued in similar terms: ‘The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered.’<sup>51</sup> In 1935 he stressed: ‘In so far as the Soviet bureaucracy is forced in its own interests to preserve the frontiers and institutions of the Russian Soviet republic against foes without and within, and to give heed to the development of the nationalized productive forces, this bureaucracy is still fulfilling a progressive historic task, and has the right to the support of the workers of the world.’<sup>52</sup>

In such arguments, socialism is equated with state property and nationalised productive forces are deemed to be progressive. However, the nationalisation of property did not by itself determine a progressive transformation of class and gender relations. The proletariat was still constituted and reconstituted in everyday life in work and society; class and gender antagonisms continued and were reproduced as ‘Soviet’ society empowered new layers of managers and subordinated workers and women.

One way of adapting to new thinking is to add demands to a shopping list. Such lists of demands—those of the past and those of the present—may include demands for aspects of social revolution: demands for workers’ management or workers’ control, equal wages and conditions, changes in gender relations, etc. Some of these were also set out in the agenda of the Bolshevik Party.<sup>53</sup> But priorities matter. Lenin’s priority was a ‘political’ revolution dominated by his party, with questions of change in the fields of social relations—in respect of gender and management—having little current interest or priority. If, within such a matrix of priorities, new state structures are formed, it does not follow that such formations will facilitate the economic and social structures that socialists want. A government influenced by ‘communist’ parties may be in office, but ‘communists’ will not be in power. Rather the pressures and attractions exerted by unchanged social relations may jell with persons having a measure of managerial and executive power obstructing social liberation.

Paul Blackledge defends the construction of workers’ states and notes: ‘The rational kernel of the anarchist caricature of Marxism is the fact that the most powerful voices claiming to be Marxists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were statist (of either the Stalinist or Maoist variety) who presided over brutal systems that were far from anything we would recognise as socialist.’<sup>54</sup> He defends a Leninist tradition: ‘The struggle for socialism from this perspective is not so much a struggle against authority as it is a struggle to smash one undemocratic form of authority and replace it with a democratic alternative.’<sup>55</sup> What then is a democratic alternative, or a democratic form of authority?

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<sup>50</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976, p 362.

<sup>51</sup> L. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, London: New Park, 1975, p 170.

<sup>52</sup> Our emphasis; from the 1935 English introduction to the second edition of *Terrorism and Communism*, p 9.

<sup>53</sup> Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC*, 2007, pp 9–10.

<sup>54</sup> Note 15 in Blackledge, IS, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Blackledge, IS, 125.

## Authority

Insofar as modern society involves expertise and specialisation, people naturally accept that in particular fields they habitually depend on the particular expertise of other people. But—as Bakunin wrote—an acceptance of expertise is not to be equated with coercive authority.

“I bow before the authority of special men because it is imposed on me by my own reason. I am conscious of my own inability to grasp, in all its detail, and positive development, any very large portion of human knowledge. The greatest intelligence would not be equal to a comprehension of the whole. Thence results, for science as well as for industry, the necessity of the division and association of labour. I receive and I give—such is human life. Each directs and is directed in his turn. Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination.”<sup>56</sup>

There is a difference between an authority which presupposes the right of some—managers, commissars, scientists and academics—to order others about and an expertise which may be voluntarily recognised—or rejected. Lenin’s conception assumed both authority and uniformity. Coercive iron discipline was naturally ‘proletarian.’<sup>57</sup> We have quoted above his view that democracy was something proper only to the political sphere and not to economic life. Blackledge writes:

“Whereas capitalist states deploy military and ideological powers to maintain capitalist social relations, workers’ states mobilise their resources in the interests of suppressing the barriers to building a society based around meeting human needs. Because workers do not exploit any class below them, as these barriers are gradually overcome workers’ states will tend to ‘wither away.’”<sup>58</sup>

Lenin, as we have noted, saw authority as a natural, and his slogan of ‘iron discipline’ begged the question of who would discipline whom? Coercive disciplining involved the construction and reproduction of authorities obstructing the development of equitable social relations. There are many instances of Lenin talking about cultural revolution, or comradely relations amongst working people, but reality did not reflect such talk. It is not easy to uncover in Bolshevik practice any model practices showing how forces imposing discipline might be democratically constrained or controlled. Centralised power and iron military fashion discipline left little room for the development of self-management and social solidarity. Libertarians and socialists documented the Bolshevik state’s use of coercion against working people and others.<sup>59</sup>

Blackledge writes: ‘Anarchists argue that, because they reject the goal of winning state power, they have no need of the centralised political structures of those that do.’<sup>60</sup> In his view anarchists deny the need for concerted and collective action, and are trapped at the level of civil

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<sup>56</sup> Writing in ‘God and the State.’ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/godstate/index.htm>

<sup>57</sup> ‘We, the workers, shall organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers.’ *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp 431.

<sup>58</sup> Blackledge, *IS*, 125.

<sup>59</sup> For example, see Gregory P. Maxsimov, *The Guillotine at Work*, Volume 1, Sanday, Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1979. (First published 1940.)

<sup>60</sup> *IS*, 125.



society.<sup>61</sup> Some anarchists, such as Luigi Galleani, did condemn organisation. This was not helpful. All socialists, insofar as they wish to live in a society with complex systems of technology and production, have to look to forms of organisation that best maximise freedom, but differ as to what shape these may take. They may look to communities (large and small, at work and in localities), to varied forms (neutral or politicised unions, organisations or parties of this or that trend of opinion or councils or factory committees) and to varied relationships between such organisational shapes. Soviets were widely accepted by many anarchists as a form of non-oppressive participatory polity. All sorts of rebels who rejected Bolshevik domination demanded free Soviets. On occasion, anarchists chose weaker or stronger forms of organisation depending on tasks faced. Malatesta noted that certain delicate tasks—a euphemism for preparations for armed struggle—could not be discussed openly. After July 1936 many anarcho-syndicalists exercised self-discipline and accepted unity of command amongst their militias. Many anarchists do accept non-coercive forms of co-ordination and do look for national and international structures for matters that are best tackled on a wider scale,<sup>62</sup> and that cannot be resolved on a local scale. Anarchists describe the form of collaborative coordination that they choose as federalism and counter-pose this to centralised Leninist forms, which they view as Jacobin, bourgeois and managerial.<sup>63</sup>

Experience in Spain in the 1930s suggests that de-centralisation was no panacea. In the run-up to 1936, Spanish anarchists and socialists organised regional risings and an attempted revolution, but these went off one by one, and were more easily defeated because they did not take place all at once. There were dangers in decision making at a local or regional level, where wider national factors were not weighed up. But the Leninist contention that disrespects particular local preferences and argues for one central or international leadership was no panacea either; it obstructed discussion and the reconciliation of diversity. This disrespect continues if Leninists continue to argue for a choice between centralisation or chaos, rather than a range of choices.

Hierarchical relations of production—between owners and the dispossessed, between managers and the managed, between leaders and the led, between the old and the young—may be reformulated where property and capital is taken away from private capitalists, but may survive in new forms. Sexist relations of production—where women cook, clean and do childcare and men do not—may survive transformations defined primarily by the expropriation of capital and of property rights. Insofar as Leninists have embraced authority, centralism, and have prioritised ‘politics’ above social revolution, the political democracy that has been prioritised has been seen as neglectful and failing to support the development of socialist and feminist forces for participation and sharing in social and economic life.

Lenin’s practice in and after 1917 subordinated the social agenda to the creation of a new state, and then pushed it out of sight. Blackledge writes that Lenin had a ‘nominal position of power’ and floundered before unbeatable odds.<sup>64</sup> A quick look at the range of subjects addressed by Lenin in messages to Bolshevik leaders will attest to the huge range of his influence. It might be fair to say that in his last years and with illness Lenin lost some capacity, but prior to this his power was as substantial, wide ranging and largely unaccountable.

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<sup>61</sup> *IS*, 131, p 198.

<sup>62</sup> See for example, Gregory P. Maximov, *Constructive Anarchism*, Chicago: Maximov Memorial Publication Committee, 1952, pp 133–4.

<sup>63</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Les Soviets trahis par les Bolsheviks*, Paris: Spartacus, 1973, Chapter 7.

<sup>64</sup> *IS*, 131, p 200.

It is true that circumstances were incredibly difficult. No strategy would have been easy to implement. But the fact remains that Bolsheviks did not value critics, but sought to crush them.<sup>65</sup> Within the Russian Party and at Lenin's behest opposition factions were banned. Bolshevism allowed no space for doubts and made a virtue out of necessity. Bolsheviks sought to export their thinking and mould others in their image. In much of Western Europe, it was taken as axiomatic that they had been successful and their model should be followed. The Third International did not accept a pluralist model; from its early congresses it set out to promote its scientific socialism, and ideology, as a world-wide model. Insofar as Bolshevism prioritised the construction of a new state, it is useful to consider what forces were working within this new structure.

## The State That Lenin Built

What were the features of the new state constructed, or reconstructed, by the Bolsheviks? Consider this decree from the Soviet of People's Commissars of 7 January 1918:

1. Soviets of Workmen's, Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies, being local organs, are quite independent in regard to questions of a local character, but always act in accord with the decrees of the central Soviet Government as well as of the larger bodies (district, provincial, and regional Soviets) of which they form a part.
2. Upon the Soviets, as organs of government, devolve the tasks of administration and service in all departments of local life-administrative, economic, financial, and educational.
3. Under administration, the Soviets carry out all decrees and decisions of the central Government, take measures for giving the people the widest information about those decisions, issue obligatory ordinances, make requisitions and confiscations, impose fines, suppress counter-revolutionary organs of the press, make arrests, and dissolve public organizations which incite active opposition or the overthrow of the Soviet Government.  
NOTE. The Soviets render a report to the central Soviet Government regarding all measures undertaken by them and important local events.
4. The Soviets elect from their number an executive organ which is charged with the duty of carrying out their decisions and the performance of the current work of administration.<sup>66</sup>

The Central Soviet Government did not recognise any commitment to consult with local Soviets or with the working people within these bodies. Reading these lines, and between these lines, one can see a pattern of power distribution with reports flowing upwards, orders flowing downwards. Russia's new central state wanted to encourage the creation of executive committees in localities, so that it could hold specific people responsible for carrying out its orders. Local Soviets were ceasing to be participatory bodies and were becoming mere executive committees, now subordinated to central government. The local state was more a cog in a centralised and bureaucratic nexus of power, rather than a forum for working men—still less for women—to make

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<sup>65</sup> The revolution in Spain also witnessed tendencies towards a centralised and hierarchal exercise of power within the CNT and FAI after 1936.

<sup>66</sup> James Bunyan and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1918: Documents and Materials*, Stanford University Press, 1934, p 280.

decisions on their own initiative, in co-operation with others. If non-conformists won control of Soviets they were replaced. There was a change of name as Ministries became Commissariats, but not a change of organisational practice.

Charles Post, like many latter-day-Leninists, seeks to draw a line around the year 1923.<sup>67</sup> After that date brutal features are to be condemned, and Stalin can safely be blamed for the degeneration of the revolution, whilst the errors of Lenin and Trotsky can be overlooked. Such a view distorts reality and excuses the authoritarian dynamics of the post-October polity, not to mention the brutality and venality that existed already, before 1923.

## Party or Party?

The concept of party organisation is susceptible of various interpretations amongst those who aspire to a radical and socialist refashioning of society. The organisational ethos on the German Social-Democratic Party has been characterised as:

“zombie like obedience typical of centralism... [and]... The secure appointment, the heightened social position, the punctually paid salary, the well heated office, the quickly learnt routine in the carrying out of formal administrative business, engender a mentality which makes the labour official in no way distinguishable from the petty post, tax, community or state official as much in his post as in his domestic milieu. The official is for correct management of business, painstaking orderliness, smooth discharge of obligations; he hates disturbances, friction, conflicts. Nothing is so repugnant to him as chaos, therefore he opposes any sort of disorder; he combats the initiative and independence of the masses; he fears the revolution.”<sup>68</sup>

A libertarian or anarchist party—in the tradition defined by Malatesta—may be characterised by a measured diversity and a tolerance of some varied tactics, so long as tactics used are not at variance and in conflict with strategies of the organisation. In this view the ‘party’ has particular characteristics: it seeks to be provocative rather than directing:

“... I think that what is essential is not the triumph of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which moreover need to be confirmed in practice and which in practice may need modification, development and adaptation to real material and moral conditions of time and place. What matters most, is that people, that all, lose the instincts and habits of being sheep acquired through the millennia of slavery, to learn to think and act freely.”<sup>69</sup>

Any anarchist organisation seeking to promote its agenda against other agendas is partisan. What may distinguish libertarian and Bolshevik organisational models is the ambition of each. Libertarians will be concerned with decentralising and socialising of power and leadership more

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<sup>67</sup> SR 2013, p 175.

<sup>68</sup> From Otto Ruhle, *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution*, London: Socialist Reproductions, n.d., pp 25–6; 28–9.

<sup>69</sup> Malatesta, ‘Response to Nestor Makhno’, *Le Reveil*, Geneva, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1929. [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/platform/malatesta\\_reply.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/platform/malatesta_reply.html).

than winning power for itself; they have preconceptions but seek to test these ideas, and to develop new insights through experience. Libertarians—at least those who value Malatesta’s contribution to anarchism—might recognise that leadership exists, and that the problem of leadership lies in the nature of relations between leaders and the led. In the late 1920s, Malatesta commented as follows in a debate as to whether an anarchist party could direct struggles:

“It is possible to direct through advice and example, leaving the people—provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves—to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command that is by becoming a government and imposing one’s own ideas and interests through police methods.”<sup>70</sup> [...]

“It is in fact a question of education for freedom, of making people who are accustomed to obedience and passivity consciously aware of their real power and capabilities. One must encourage people to do things for themselves, or to think they are doing so by their own initiative and inspiration even when in fact their actions have been suggested by others, just as the good school teacher when he sets a problem that students cannot solve immediately, helps the pupil in such a way that the student imagines that they have found the solution unaided, thus acquiring courage and confidence in their own abilities. This is what we should do in our propaganda. If our critic has ever made propaganda among those who we, with too much disdain, call politically ‘unconscious,’ it will have occurred to him to find himself making an effort not to appear to be expounding and forcing on them a well-known and universally accepted truth; they will have tried to stimulate thought to get them to arrive with their own reason at conclusions which they could have served up ready-made, much more easily so far as he was concerned, but with less profit for the ‘beginner’ in politics. And if one ever found oneself in a position of having to act as leader or teacher in some action or in propaganda, when others were passive one would have tried to avoid making the situation obvious, so as to stimulate them to think, to take the initiative and gain confidence in themselves.”<sup>71</sup>

In this view leadership is constituted by the repudiation of authority. The leader is someone in dialogue who seeks to promote consciousness and solidarity. A leader may have some useful ideas, but such utility is defined through timely dialogue and not by her or his assertion that they have some superiority of consciousness. Restraints can fall away in hot times: ‘It was amazing, everybody turned into a parrot, everyone wanted to say what he or she thought and felt. They obviously felt themselves in charge now and with the right to speak for themselves...’<sup>72</sup>

Such a view contrasts with the style of Marxists who wrote that their party:

“... leads the workers in all the manifestations of its class struggle, reveals to it the irreconcilable conflict of the interests between themselves and the exploiters and

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<sup>70</sup> Errico Malatesta, (Vernon Richards, Ed), *The Anarchist Revolution*, London: Freedom Press, 1995, p 108.

<sup>71</sup> L’Adunata de Refrattari, 26.12.1931, from *Malatesta*, Richards ed., London: Freedom Press, 1965, p 179.

<sup>72</sup> Speaking of the atmosphere immediately after the revolution in Spain in July 1936, quoted from: Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, New York: Pantheon, 1979, pp 214–5.

explains to the proletariat the historical importance and the necessary conditions of the imminent social revolution. At the same time the party reveals to other sections of the toiling and exploited masses the hopelessness of their condition in capitalist society, and shows them that the social revolution is indispensable...<sup>73</sup>

Such perspectives have been criticised for disrespecting the capacity of working people and for asserting that the party knows best, and possesses thought.<sup>74</sup>

In a revolutionary situation, in April 1920, having in view the need to encourage working people to act and not to wait on initiatives from party and union leaders Malatesta argued: 'The necessity of the hour is insurrection, armed insurrection.' He called for discipline, not the discipline of sheep, a blind dedication to leaders, but revolutionary discipline, in accordance with accepted ideas, and with commitments made, a sense of sharing between comrades in struggle. To win, the movement needed to spread throughout Italy. Arms were needed. Services needed to be cut off if they served the state but maintained if they served the people. 'We need to agree on what we must do, and when particular circumstances come about, we must act at once without waiting for orders from anyone, and disregarding orders which are contrary to the action agreed.'<sup>75</sup>

Malatesta also called on his own particular organisation—the Italian Anarchist Union—to carry out certain delicate military preparations. Certain forms of organisation were more appropriate for particular tasks. The idea that varied forms of organisation were appropriate for distinct tasks would also develop in the feminist movement.<sup>76</sup>

It is sometimes noted that although present, the party concept is given little emphasis in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*.<sup>77</sup> Whatsoever the form may be of a new transformed polity, socialists may perhaps assume that people will come together and organise in disparate and conflicting organisations and parties (or fragments) to explore and promote particular ideas for social change. The French syndicalists Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget had quite another perspective in a book that set out their vision: *How we shall bring about the Revolution*.<sup>78</sup> Pataud and Pouget looked to a future where parties voluntarily effaced themselves. This prognosis has, so far, never become reality. If parties continue to exist in a new society, how should they relate to each other, and how should party members relate to non-party people? Socialists who accept pluralism may value organs of mass participatory democracy—whatever they may be—because they facilitate negotiation and accommodation between currents of opinion and their organisations and parties. Rudolf Rocker set out this conclusion to his survey of Bolshevism: 'For all power to councils, and for nothing above councils! This is our slogan which will also become the slogan of the revolution.'<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bolshevik Party Programme, March 1919, in *The ABC*, 2007, p 5.

<sup>74</sup> One critical perspective is outlined by Sheila Rowbotham, see especially a section on 'Where does Consciousness come from,' in Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright in *Beyond the Fragments*, Merlin Press, 2013, p 201ff.

<sup>75</sup> *Umanita Nova*, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1920; in Errico Malatesta, *Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes*, Annency: Groupe 1er Mai, 1982, pp 118, 120–1.

<sup>76</sup> See arguments by Jo Freman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*; and Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright in *Beyond the Fragments*.

<sup>77</sup> For example see Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*, London: Merlin Press, p 142.

<sup>78</sup> Emile Pataud & Emile Pouget, *How we shall bring about the Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 1990; [First published in Paris, in 1909; English edition, 1913; *Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth*.]

<sup>79</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Les Soviets trahis par les Bolsheviks*, Paris: Spartacus, 1973, p 92.

One can find writings by Lenin that support initiative. However, these were not incorporated into the Bolshevik tradition of ‘Party’ set out between 1919 and 1921, and set out as a model for the Third International. Bolsheviks regularly lambasted opponents with dishonest and or sexist epithets. Such discourse often opposed a ridiculous option—such and such a course causes chaos—to other propositions that appear more sensible and reasonable. Of course it did not follow that the particular changes advocated were the only ones, or best ones that should be adopted now as the alternative to a particular problem. (Contemporary politicians use a similar discourse, for example: the British National Health Service is not well, so we must make these pro-business changes.) Such discourse was and is a facet of bourgeois management, where managers seek to foreclose some options and to curtail space for alternatives and oppositions. When one reads Lenin one must always ‘mind the gap,’ the gap between some option that he may condemn, and the assumption that there was only one other choice, the one that he favoured. For example, in May 1920 Lenin wrote this of those wishing to have a holiday on 1 May:

“only malicious enemies of the working people, only malicious supporters of the bourgeoisie, can treat the May 1<sup>st</sup> subbotnik with disdain;<sup>80</sup> only the most contemptible people, who have irrevocably sold themselves to capitalists, can condemn the utilisation of the great First of May festival for a mass-scale attempt to introduce communist labour.”<sup>81</sup>

Mensheviks were the particular target of this scorn. In calling them contemptible and sold out to capitalism, Lenin was using prejudicial either/or logic. In his view those who wanted a May Day holiday, were to be cursed; a challenge to party policy, and party supremacy was damnable. He was using an amalgam of the sort that would subsequently often be used by the Stalinists. His vituperative discourse worked to support a brutal confrontational polity, where democratic sentiment had little place. Thus in a speech in June 1920 he argued:

“The proletarian dictatorship should display itself primarily in the advanced, the most class-conscious and most disciplined of the urban and industrial workers- the greatest sufferers from hunger who have made great sacrifices during these two years- educating, training and disciplining all the other proletarians, who are often not class-conscious, and all working people and the peasantry. All sentimentality, all claptrap about democracy must be scrapped.”<sup>82</sup>

This conflated the party with those conscious industrial workers—or at least those who did continue to support the Bolsheviks—as the master of working people in general. Party dominance over Soviets was decreed in party norms: ‘The party must ensure that its decisions are implemented through Soviet organs... ‘Every question which is to be decided by that non-party organization in which the faction works must be discussed beforehand... ‘ all members should subsequently vote together in line with decisions of the faction.’<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of subbotnik see ‘Looking Back: An Afterword,’ in Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC*, 2007, p 342.

<sup>81</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, Moscow: Progress Publishers, and London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974, p 123.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p 176, June 1920, emphasis added.

<sup>83</sup> Mervyn Matthews, *Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974, pp 134–5, and 144.

In the debate on the role of the party, at the Second Congress of the Third International, in August 1920, Zinoviev defined the CP as follows: ‘The Communist Party is created by the method of the natural selection of the best, the most class-conscious, the most self-sacrificing, and the most far-sighted workers. The Communist Party has no interests that differ from the interests of the whole working class.’<sup>84</sup> The party had always been predominantly male, it took on a new form with many members being managers and commissars in the state, army, security services, unions, or in industry. ‘Nature’ had its roots in current social, gender, and class relations.

After the middle of 1918, much of the support that the Bolsheviks had had ebbed away. One might extrapolate that notwithstanding the fact that for one moment a tendency had support or was offering a positive lead, yet, this capacity was not to be assumed at a later moment or facing up to other circumstances. For a moment and for a time a party might be useful, but this utility might well be temporary and fragmentary. A ‘fragment’ would never have all the answers, and could not offer a useful lead in all circumstances. Other ‘fragments’ might have some capacity to lead in other contexts. Malatesta believed that organisations do not last forever:

“...the life and permanence of an organisation depends on how successful it has been in the long struggle we must wage, and it is natural that any institution instinctively seeks to last indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the consequence of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continual changes of circumstances. When it is no longer able to accomplish a useful task it is better that it should die.”<sup>85</sup>

Charles Post writes that Leninism has an ongoing value—and ‘that Leninism cannot be reduced to the post-1923 caricature of “democratic centralism.”’<sup>86</sup> Paul Blackledge writes of the dictatorship of the proletariat as ‘real democratic control by the working class.’<sup>87</sup> Was there some reasonable democratic centralism? This is how the Bolsheviks set out their objectives:

“The Communist Party has undertaken to win definitive influence and unquestioned leadership in all organisations of working people, in the unions, co-operatives, village communes, etc. The Communist Party strives especially to carry out its program and to exercise unlimited leadership in the present governmental organisations the soviets... By practical daily dedicated work in the soviets and by filling all soviet positions with its best and most loyal members, the Russian Communist Party must win undivided political rule in the soviets and practical control over all its activities.”<sup>88</sup>

These norms assumed that: ‘Outright military discipline is needed in the party in the present epoch.’<sup>89</sup> This conclusion was also taken as being axiomatic for the Third International as a whole.

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<sup>84</sup> Third Session, July 24: <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch03a.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> *Il Risveglio*, (Geneva), October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1927.

<sup>86</sup> *SR* 2013, p 175.

<sup>87</sup> *IS*, 131, p 43.

<sup>88</sup> Oskar Anweiler: *The Soviets*, New York: Pantheon, 1974, p 241, emphasis added. See also the text in Mervyn Matthews, *Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974, p 135.

<sup>89</sup> Organization decree and Party statutes passed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Conference and 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, March and December, 1919, in Mervyn Matthews, *Soviet Government*, pp 134–5, and 144.

At the 9<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Conference on 24 September, 1920 it was argued that: ‘The chief conclusion of the proletarian revolution is the need for an iron, organised and monolithic party.’ Zinoviev, leader of the Third International set out the creation of party based ‘iron discipline’ as the chief teaching of Bolshevism for the wider world;<sup>90</sup> and Lenin wrote: ‘Whoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship), is actually aiding the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.’<sup>91</sup> Trotsky offered nothing to those who challenged Bolshevik party megalomania.<sup>92</sup> It was he who set out the view that the Party was always right at its 13<sup>th</sup> congress in May 1924:

“None of us desires or is able to dispute the will of the Party. Clearly, the Party is always right... We can only be right with and by the Party, for history has provided no other way of being in the right.”<sup>93</sup>

History had created an alternative to this model, with soviets providing a means of negotiating differences between different sections or working people but the Bolsheviks had resolved on unquestioned, unlimited, and undivided mastery. Organs of mass participation had been gutted or destroyed wherever they challenged Bolshevik dominance. Soviets, factory, and housing committees and assemblies had become empty shells. The party intimidated opposing left organisations. What was created in Lenin’s years of power did not evolve passively, just as a function of harsh events and circumstances, as apologists maintain, but was shaped by party resolutions and choices. Management was empowered through the slogan of ‘iron discipline’ and was not held in check. Democratically elected Soviet delegates could not prevent the abuse of power.

Rather, managers and commissars managed the electoral process to obtain desired results. At this time the potential of Soviet or mass democracy was sidelined and forgotten, and a partyist conception was promoted throughout the Third International.

Some anarchists also may be afflicted by a macho mania that they alone have all the answers, but this is a mania seen more often and more rabidly amongst Leninists who see themselves as the natural leadership of the class, a natural vanguard, with a uniquely elevated level of consciousness. This mania was first advanced by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto where they set out that communists could see further than the rest.<sup>94</sup> Bakunin recognised some genius in the political economy of Marx, but he never conceded that this genius endowed Marx and his friends with any particular rights to govern and shape the labour movement. In their discourse of leading the working class, Leninist leaders spoke for themselves, for layers of a coordinator class, or perhaps for fragments of working people but not for a majority of working people.<sup>95</sup>

Those seeing authority as a normal-relationship, rather than as a problem-relationship, are also prone to reproduce hierarchy and authority in their own organisations. In recent, times one can see harder and softer forms of Leninism. Some left organisations or parties have a largely democratic internal regime allowing tendencies the right to organise internally and, to a degree, may prefigure a pluralist left polity. Some ‘Leninists’ have embraced socialist pluralism and one

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Robert Service, *Lenin: A Political Life*, Vol. 3, London: Macmillan, 1985, p 142.

<sup>91</sup> ‘Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder’ 1920, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, 1974, p 45

<sup>92</sup> Trotsky set out his appreciation of militarist relations in *Terrorism and Communism*, London: New Park, 1975.

<sup>93</sup> Boris Souvarine, *Stalin*, London: Secker & Warburg, undated, pp 362–3.

<sup>94</sup> See note 30 above.

<sup>95</sup> Such patterns persist when Leninist vanguards in broad fronts assume that they knew the way forward and the next step, and when they insist on their leadership rights, undermining the solidarity of such fronts.



might say they have ceased to be Leninist, as this term was understood by the Third International before 1923. Paul Blackledge writes:

“Nevertheless, because the working class is fragmented and workers’ struggles tend to be sectional, the idea that workers’ councils represent a more democratic form of political organisation must be won inside the workers’ movement against those who deny it. This implies the need for some form of political organisation whose aim is to win the majority over to socialism. Such an organisation cannot prefigure socialism because by its victory it begins to create the conditions for its own dissolution.”<sup>96</sup>

In this last sentence socialism is predicated on the single party and its victory. Criticisms of the internal workings of the particular party embraced by this writer are in the public domain.<sup>97</sup> These suggest that the vituperative discourse that Lenin used routinely against internal and external oppositions lives on into present times. If such viciousness prevails within the party, it is hardly likely to be kept out of party activities with non-party people. If such discourse is allowed, a party’s capacity to prefigure or promote socialism must be limited.

There is perhaps little likelihood that any one party or organisation will predominate in a new socialist society. It seems more reasonable to assume that for socialism to develop democratically (and without democracy socialism is inconceivable) various forms—parties and other bodies—might come together in councils to resolve differences. If so, socialism would be predicated on conviviality, rather than on the victory of the singular party. In this view socialists might look to other models of party and might repudiate the macho, militarist and scientific-socialist brutality that is a constituent part of Lenin’s Leninism.

Socialists may perhaps prefer to look to a future in which organs of mass democracy make decisions, respecting the rights of others to organise. They may prefer to obstruct any monopolistic ownership of power, either for themselves, or for any other single party or organisation, and may prefer to promote the sharing of expertise and the destruction of authority. Conversely, expertise might be recognised, and where it is agreed that that expertise is being applied for the benefit of all, experts might be appreciated and esteemed.

## Unions and Unions

Particular circumstances influenced the development of the German labour movement. The state legislated that national union federations should not discuss political questions. Leaders of the free trade unions, allies of the Social Democratic Party, chose to work largely within these parameters, leaving political questions to the party. They took these norms and sought to make them common within the trade union international that they led in the years running up to

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<sup>96</sup> *IS*, 131, p 199.

<sup>97</sup> See comments by a leading SWP member, John Molyneux, on the British Socialist Worker’s Party internal organisational practice. In this view inner leaders hang together; SWP conferences deny dissidents the right to reply whilst leaders are each given time to rebut criticisms from outer party members, often making their criticisms ‘aggressively and personally. The net effect of the practices has been (a) to load all debates massively in the leadership’s favour, (b) to make open disagreement at national meetings (as opposed to in private conversation) a highly disagreeable experience with little prospect of success. In other words it has been to deter dissent.’ *Weekly Worker*, [London] No. 553, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2004, p 7.

the outbreak of the First World War. Politics was divorced from economics—by order of the Bismarkian state. A small dissident tendency which preferred local organisation, in which political discussion was allowed did resist this legislation, eventually these former socialists developed a syndicalist identity.

Errico Malatesta set out an anarchist-communist perspective on the value and limitations of unions. At the Anarchist International congress held in Amsterdam in 1907, he drew a distinction between the labour movement on the one hand and syndicalism on the other. The movement was a fact, but syndicalism was not; the doctrine of syndicalism being sufficient in itself was mistaken. Malatesta spoke of potential conflict within the working class and viewed all unions or syndicates, as potentially conservative. Whilst he supported activity in the workers' movement he argued that, in general, those who worked as union officials were lost to the movement because they came to be indebted to the unions that paid them rather than to the wider movement. If they followed their conscience, they could lose their union job; if they followed their self-interest to preserve their job in the union, they lost their politics. As with parliamentary socialism, unionism led to corruption. 'In the workers' [union] movement, the official is a danger, one that can only be compared with parliamentarianism: both lead to corruption and from corruption to death there isn't far to go.'<sup>98</sup> In periods of relative calm, and later, when fascism was advancing Malatesta preferred broad and politically neutral unions. He doubted that new members would have the agenda of older members and thought that union politics would mostly exist only on paper. In 1920, in the midst of revolutionary upheavals in Italy, Malatesta was more positive about the utility of working in unions:

“It will therefore be necessary at all costs to win the confidence of the masses, and be in a position to ‘push’ them when they are in the mood for action, and for this it seemed useful to secure executive posts in the workers’ organisations. All the dangers of reformism, corruption were pushed into the background, and in any case it was assumed that there wouldn’t be time for them to take effect.”<sup>99</sup>

Beyond Germany other patterns of union organisation developed in the run up to 1914. Radical workers in hundreds of thousands chose to reject the routine quietness of social-democratic union centres and parties. The French General Workers' Confederation (CGT) defined itself by a rejection of political schools and by a preference for direct action as opposed to parliamentary politics. In Italy, Spain, and Portugal, mass radical syndicalist unions came together in opposition to social-democratic labour organisations, sometimes drawing in dissatisfied ex-party members. The Italian General Labour Confederation (CGL), close to the Socialist Party, harboured a variety of conservative and left tendencies. When an Italian Syndicalist Union (USI) came together in 1912 many CGL members chose to break away to join them. Syndicalists and anarchists had considerable influence among railway workers but the rail union preserved its autonomous status, outside the USI and CGL. In Spain, the syndicalists in the CNT organised a new union confederation in 1910–11 larger than the union centre allied with the Second International. Smaller bodies

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<sup>98</sup> Ariane Mieville & Maurizio Antonioli, Eds., *Anarchisme & syndicalisme*. Congres Anarchiste International d'Amsterdam (1907), Paris: Monde Libertaire, 1997, pp 193–199.

<sup>99</sup> *Malatesta*, Richards ed., 1965, pp. 127–8.

developed in other parts of Europe. These organisations, and a large part of the French CGT,<sup>100</sup> organised opposition to pre-war colonial interventions, and for the most part resolutely opposed mobilisation and war.<sup>101</sup> In the run up to 1914, the CGT had made use of links in the trade union international that ran side by side with the Second International to attempt to have that body resolve to launch strikes and struggles to prevent war breaking out. The German free trade unions obstructed any such resolution and at times even prevented these matters from being raised at international trade union meetings.<sup>102</sup>

Many ‘syndicalists’<sup>103</sup> were working to form a broad anti-war and revolutionary network before 1914, providing an alternative to the parliamentary socialists and combating the nationalism that prevailed in and around the Second International. Moreover, the disquiet roused by the practices of the Second International was not confined to syndicalists’ organisations. There were dissidents even in Germany expressing alarm at compromised, quietist politics. Sometimes, where they roused the ire of union officials, they were expelled, and went on to join a small localist/syndicalist union centre. Others, Anton Pannekoek as well as Rosa Luxemburg, were challenging the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party—both the right (Ebert) and the centre (Kautsky).

## The Revolutionary Left Wing of Social Democracy

Charles Post makes three rather doubtful points in his article in *Socialist Register 2013*. He writes (1): ‘The First World War ended the unstable social-democratic alliance between reformist union and party officials and militant rank-and-file workers’<sup>104</sup> (2) that ‘radical trade unionists constituted the mass audience for the ‘revolutionary left wing of social democracy—Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, and before 1914, Kautsky.’<sup>105</sup> (3) That mass communist parties formed in 1920–21 and ‘rejected the politics of left communism,’ embracing a strategy of common action with social democratic workers.<sup>106</sup>

Regarding the first point, we have noted above that rifts were developing within and against social democracy before 1914. In Italy and Spain, syndicalists organised mass organisations against the passivity and reformism of the Second International before the outbreak of the First World War. These and others came together in a Syndicalist International and rejected both Second and Third International parties.

Regarding the second point, while there were some commonalities between them, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci and Kautsky did not stand together in these times.<sup>107</sup> Luxemburg criticised the party form as espoused by Lenin before 1917, and thereafter was critical of Lenin’s

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<sup>100</sup> Anarchists also opposed national armed forces and imperialist colonial interventions; but, in the First World War, a current, led by Kropotkin, argued that German Imperialism was the greater danger and to a degree supported the Allied war effort.

<sup>101</sup> The French CGT did not launch a general strike against war in 1914. A tendency sympathetic to French war effort was expelled from the USI.

<sup>102</sup> The free trade unions were allied to the German Social Democratic Party.

<sup>103</sup> There were of course a variety of syndicalisms, just as there are varieties of Anarchism and Marxism.

<sup>104</sup> SR 2013, p 179.

<sup>105</sup> SR 2013, p 176.

<sup>106</sup> SR 2013, p 180.

<sup>107</sup> Post’s quintet passes over other figures influential in the first years of the Third International: Bela Kun, Bordiga, Levi, Pannekoek, Radek and Zinoviev.

undemocratic Russia.<sup>108</sup> She was a critic of Kautsky before 1914, criticising his alliance with the right wing of German social-democracy. Gramsci only began to draw on a Leninist party concept from 1920; before that time his viewpoint reflected experiences within the mass democracy that emerged in factory committees in Turin in 1918–9, and his inspiration came from De Leon, and the IWW as much as by early Leninist texts.<sup>109</sup> Only after 1925 did he replace Bordiga as leader of the Italian communist party.

Commonalities—opposition to war and support for revolution in Russia—did help build bridges amongst all left tendencies, but conflicting perspectives divided these tendencies both before and after the watershed of war and revolution. Revolutionaries were not a homogenous lot. They were not confined to followers of Lenin and Trotsky, (or the late Rosa Luxemburg); there were many revolutionaries—Left Communists, Industrial Unionists, and syndicalists—who rejected the social democracy and the Third International.

The third point on communists' common action with social democrats is also dubious. On at least two key occasions, pro-Moscow orthodox communists adopted sectarian politics, whilst others embraced a timely policy of united action with social democrats. When the Kapp putsch threatened, syndicalists were among the first to call for a general strike, whilst the German CP rejected this policy. In Italy it was also syndicalists who helped build Arditi del popolo to fight fascist squads, whilst the CP refused to work together with syndicalists, anarchists, and socialists. At these times parts of the radical left worked for a united class campaign against fascism whilst the official CPs embraced sectarianism.

Earlier, in 1918–9, in the matter of trade union organisation in Germany, there was common cause between those who would become orthodox communists and those left communists, syndicalists, and Industrial Unionists who by 1920 would be entirely outside the bounds of Moscow-defined-orthodoxy. There was a modicum of consensus against Social-Democrats and their trade union allies. The foundation conference of the German Communist Party agreed that given the abysmal war record of the trade unions it was appropriate to leave them and to build new Industrial Unions.<sup>110</sup> Two networks developed: one looked more to the IWW as model,<sup>111</sup> and another looked more to unions with localist roots,<sup>112</sup> promoting the concept of a Social General Strike.<sup>113</sup> Luxemburg chose to challenge the Social Democrats and their unions from the outside, a strategy of trying to win them (and others) over to radical and participatory politics. In 1920–21 these new unions sought to promote active works' councils with open agendas as opposed to works' councils with an agenda regulated by the state. Elections were held for council representatives.

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<sup>108</sup> Before her death Rosa Luxemburg wrote a critique: *The Russian Revolution*, London: Carl Slienger, 1977. [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg).

<sup>109</sup> Gramsci defined *L'Ordine Nuovo* as 'a translation into actual Italian history of the conceptions developed by Comrade Lenin, in selections of his published in this *L'Ordine Nuovo*, and of the ideas of the American theoretician of the revolutionary syndicalist IWW organisation: the Marxist Daniel De Leon.' <http://www.nuovopci.it/classic/gramsci/progordn.htm> accessed 10.11.12. Only a few recent texts of Lenin were known in Italy before 1920.

<sup>110</sup> Andre & Dori Prudhommeaux, *Spartacus et la Commune de Berlin, 1918–1919*, Paris: Spartacus, 1977, pp 51–55. (Rosa Luxemburg was one of those who spoke in favour of this policy.)

<sup>111</sup> AAU: Industrial Unionists, somewhat akin to the IWW and allied, in part, with the KAPD.

<sup>112</sup> The localists, who began organising in 1897, were precursors of the syndicalist FAUD (German Free Workers Union), formed in 1919.

<sup>113</sup> Pierre Ramus, *Generalstreik und direkte Aktion*, Berlin: Verlag- und Sortiments Buchandlung, 1910. See also [http://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/Ramus\\_\(1910\)\\_Generalstreik\\_&\\_direkte\\_Aktion.pdf](http://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/Ramus_(1910)_Generalstreik_&_direkte_Aktion.pdf).

In these elections, the left beyond the official CP—in the KAPD, FAUD, and AAUD<sup>114</sup> often obtained respectable support as compared with the old trade unions. Given the small numbers holding membership in such organisations,<sup>115</sup> they must have obtained some support from members of older trade unions. So, even in these very hard times, when hopes for change were failing, there were opportunities for lefts to try to pull those who were affiliated to the right wing of the labour movement towards an active and participatory politics rather than mere electioneering. Left sectarianism was not precluded amongst supporters of parties embraced by Moscow and being a critic of Moscow's line and adopting left communist and or syndicalist positions did not imply left sectarianism.

Proposals for common action between different currents raise the key question of what politics and ends are to be served, at that moment and in the longer term. Charles Post writes: 'the enduring legacy of Leninism remains the goal of constructing an independent organisation of anti-capitalist organizers and activists who attempt to project a political alternative to the forces of official reformism not only in elections, but in mass extra-parliamentary social struggles.'<sup>116</sup> Much of the radical and libertarian left looked on the new CP formed in the 1920s as bodies with compromised politics. The form of capitalism prevailing in Russia before 1917 had been overthrown, but the new form of society entrenched a bureaucratic, managerial, and commissar collectivism. Its byword—'iron discipline'—reminds us that it constructed an amalgam of socialist rhetoric and managerial power, reconstructing a new society, but one not linked in to a chain of socialist development. If the Third International was an anti-capitalist project, its socialist credentials were dubious.

Be that as it may, what is being proposed here, in this *Socialist Register*, is not just what may be considered as a misleading gloss on the past but also something for the present, i.e. the (re)creation of anti-capitalist organisations combining some form of parliamentary politics with campaigns at large. Such a project would not appeal to those anti-capitalists who do not choose to prioritise electoral politics. Amongst those who might accept a broad anti-capitalist label, there will be diverse priorities and perspectives. If anti-capitalists of all persuasions do find it useful to collaborate, they might consider another model. Malatesta described his preferences for the development of a Third International as follows:

"A true workers' international should bring together all workers who are conscious of their class interests, all workers suffering the yoke of exploitation and wanting their liberation, all workers ready to fight capitalism, each tendency using those methods which it judges most appropriate. All, anarchists, socialists, syndicalists, could join in such an International and no tendency would be forced to renounce its own aims and means. All would find both a place for their propaganda and at the same time a powerful lever to push the masses into a decisive struggle."<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps this inclusive perspective—which might be extended to include those who prioritise other vectors of struggle encompassing feminists and anti-racists—has more to offer?

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<sup>114</sup> FAUD and AAU, see notes above; KAPD: German Communist Workers Party—the left of the KPD that had been expelled by Levi over the priority of taking part in parliamentary election.

<sup>115</sup> The SPD aligned unions numbered their supporters in millions; the supporters of the FAUD and AAU were numbered in hundreds of thousands.

<sup>116</sup> *SR* 2013, p 175.

<sup>117</sup> See *Umanita Nova*, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1920; in Malatesta, *Anarchistes*, 1982, pp 184–5.

## Conclusion

If the points suggested here are helpful in mapping the past, those who find this viewpoint compelling may seek other models and not those advanced by latter-day-Leninists. Of course, times change and contexts vary. History teaches only that circumstances never repeat themselves in quite the same way. If some axioms are provoked by these perspectives, these will need to be tested and adapted to new circumstances.

Perhaps these thoughts suggest that socialists may look to a broad social transformation; one that creates a new polity but does not prioritise ‘politics’ only. Rather than seeking to create a party where the leaders know best, they will seek to promote organisations with a more communal and convivial praxis. In current conditions they may choose to promote organisations with some common understanding and priorities, embodying participatory economics, and participatory organisation.<sup>118</sup> For a socialist future they may seek to have debates about future priorities decided not primarily within their own organisations, but in bodies where there are democratic and participatory norms; and they may look to the development of new forms, where perhaps workplace and community organisation intertwine serving all men and women.

Three key propositions may emerge from the arguments above on how socialists might organise in current times and may perhaps have some future relevance. Firstly, that a socialist vision of change demands that coercive authority should be destroyed and power should be socialised, shared, and diffused amongst working people of both sexes. Secondly that transformations engendering socialism are ‘social’ and ‘economic’ and not just ‘political.’ Thirdly that it is in organs of mass democracy, and in coalitions, that diverse communities may choose to create structures for a new society rather than only, or primarily, in (fragmentary) political parties akin to those of the pre-war German Social-Democrats or the Bolsheviks. Out of partial struggles there may evolve prefigurative bodies shaping forms of mass participatory counter-power to supersede capitalism, patriarchy, and the state. The organisation or party that socialists may choose to promote socialism may be one that prefigures the future in two ways at least: it will seek to share skills and reject hierarchy and authority and it will facilitate discussion between those who have different views outside its ranks.

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Email: [tz@merlinpress.co.uk](mailto:tz@merlinpress.co.uk)

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<sup>118</sup> For one example, see Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2003. Selected European organisations that embody participatory norms are listed above, see note 4.

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