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My Disillusionment with Marxist-Leninism

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I will start by clarifying I have never been a Leninist. I am happy to say I am one of those Anarchists who has given the ideas and theories a chance. I would say gratitude is even fair, as I feel I've picked up useful tactical and theoretical insights all the way down the ideological line from Lenin. So first, let me flatter my Leninist comrades, by pointing out the concepts troublesome yet useful to Anarchist theory:

From Lenin, primarily *State and Revolution*:

- Lenin's theories of Imperialism, and its effects on the Imperialist yet Bourgeois-State, should be accepted irrefutably by Anarchists. Lenin gives a perfect outline of why American and First World global policy is the way they it is today.
- The Leninist definition for state, "the mechanism in which one social class oppresses the other" is actually very useful for Anarchists, who lack good and widely-accepted definitions for "state".

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- His hypothesis that the state is proof of “irreconcilably antagonistic classes” is demonstrative and complimentary of Anarchist theory which told us that the state is the result of the downfall of feudalism, and the property theory which allowed us to see the institutions in constant symbiotic relationships with the state. Anarchists have long known that the only way to overthrow the state is through class struggle.

Much of the Marxist-Leninist critique of Anarchism rests firmly within Lenin’s theories of Imperialism, the nature in which parliamentary capitalist states carry out a policy to exert the totality of capitalism. This leaves young socialist societies open to attack by Imperialist Bourgeois states, both from within and outside. Anarchists need to accept the need for an extended strategic social war if we are to win, and we need to have our own answers to these very legitimate questions posed by Marxist-Leninists. I could elaborate much, but I feel the concepts are actually expressed in a manner more appealing to Anarchists by Mao Zedong than that of Vladimir Lenin.

From Mao, primarily *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (known in the West commonly as the “Little Red Book”) and also *On Contradictions* and *On the Correct handling of Contradictions Amongst the People*:

- The idea of the “Mass Line” is similar to that espoused by Anarchists of the platformist (organizationalist) praxis and those of the insurrectionists (anti-organizationist) praxis. Ideological unity and class-consciousness should precede any need for consensus. Consensus should be pre-conceived amongst Anarchists, yet all too often we are not. This level of organization will come under greatest demand during our inevitable militarization (if you can even say that’s possibly for Anarchists, historically it certainly is)

- Mao's concept that we should organize along this Mass Line into "revolutionary cadres", once the political line is determined, is crucial to Anarchist organization at a certain stage. However, this concept can still be compatible with the decentralized insurrections espoused by some Anarchists. It's also fairly compatible with Anarchist platformist organizations, who seek and desire ideological unity above all else. It is along these lines that I believe we can win.
- Protracted People's War also demonstrates a useful exchange of ideas. Some speculate Mao may have been influenced by the techniques developed by Chinese Anarchists. It would be more than prudent to employ this very well developed form of attack complimented to both our insurrectionist and syndicalist/platformist strategies.
- Mao's interesting philosophical contributions of the dialectical materialist method is not just universally applicable to revolutionary socialists, but to the entire field of philosophy, especially those that claim any sort of Hegelian influence.

The parallels of Marxist-Leninism as developed by Mao, and that of classical Anarchist Communism are honestly endless, and more cross-studies are out there. Mao-spontex (or "spontaneous Maoism") took note of this, and developed a movement combining Anarchist and Maoist traditions, in Western Europe in the late 1960's and early 1970's, while the Cultural Revolution was still underway in China. Mao's unique social warfare, regarding attack and agitation are, very similar to the Anarchist praxis. Some of those who reject Mao, believe his ideological deviations begin with his idealism. I would be lying if I didn't believe that idealism is one of the things that appeals to Anarchists. From Mao's policy in Revolutionary

China, despite his persecution of ultra-leftists (which includes Anarchists) during his time as Chairman of the CPC. It can be almost assumed his idea of the state “withering away” differed from Lenin and Engels, that the state (and all oppression) must be agitated away, that was my understanding behind the Cultural Revolution and Hundred Flowers Campaign, which demonstrated Mao’s commitment to open agitation, criticism and forward development of revolutionary culture.

It is of utmost importance, even given the occasional calls for revolutionary left unity (which I will always answer), to acknowledge and remember that the schism between Marxists and Anarchists runs deep. I would dare to say that it doesn’t simply begin with the Anarchist rejection of democratic centralism (as proposed by Lenin) or even the analysis of the state. The schism lies in the development of dialectical materialism in and of itself. I would say Anarchists (likely unconsciously) have analysis similar to the more mystical sides of Hegel. I don’t think there is anything wrong with this, obviously. I believe Marx spent entirely too much effort to abandon things about Marxism that in practice, were unavoidable. I think these issues were actually realized by no one better than Mao, and his attempts to reconcile them dialectically through the correct handling of contradictions, paint quite an idealist and humanizing image to some Anarchists.

Perhaps Marx was wrong in that Hegel’s Dialectics must be “turned on their head”, or perhaps the Anarchist position is better suited for a dialectical materialist methodology *closer* to the that of Hegel’s original (which I would be more prepared to defend). I am not a dialectician and make no attempt to be such at this point, but I’ve developed a deep appreciation for them at this point. Anarchists have never had an affinity for the academy as Marxists have, but I definitely will be behind any promotion that Anarchism should become more *scientific* in our revolutionary praxis, without sacrificing the ideals and principles at the core of Anarchist theory.

asures) is treated with more legislation (if at all). This is not simply capitalism we are talking about, we are living under a cultural statism in addition to that of a cultural capitalism.

Even under the historical-materialist analysis of class struggle, I fear using the tools of the bourgeois state to be a barrier to building final Communism. I do believe in socialism as a transitory stage, but Anarchists have our own transitory socialist systems. I am fundamentally Communist, but the systems of Kevin Carson and Proudhonian Mutualism are viable mechanisms to build communism when organized under syndicalism. All in all, we wish for both our attack and building to be *organic*, something unable to be attributed to a ruler, but that of the people. We are not opposed to *organic* leadership, we distrust some leaders, but we unequivocally opposed to rulers in our revolution. No one needs to tell us to overthrow capitalism, we know we must, and solidarity means attack, and that revolution means building. The common Marxist derailment of “it’s naïve to call for the immediate abolition of the state!” usually confuses me and I find this to be a huge failure in understanding Anarchism. We believe in stateless mechanisms of the abolition of capitalism, and there lies a distinction from their understanding. Many of us are incrementalists in theory. We feel the state “withers away” *while* we abolish capitalism using stateless revolutions, not simply *after* we switch the mode of production to that of a socialist system.

So in my critique I make an appeal to the Anarchist idealism and ethics, which may bore Marxists. Not only because this is the same critique given by most Anarchists, but the core of our differences. I believe the loose-ends of Anarchism are parallel to the dead-ends of Marxist-Leninism. Our commitment to remain decentralized, egalitarian, and direct-action oriented needs to be harnessed as our strength, instead of being used as our weakness.

I am not calling for a dialectical “synthesis” of Anarchism and Marxism. I believe that Anarchists should employ our own understanding of Hegel’s very useful dialectics, and develop that. We shouldn’t make an attempt to discard Marx’s materialism, we should realize our own. Despite our hostility to the academy, Anarchism is not anti-scientific. We have refined our praxis (of which I believe most people follow one of two, or both), our ideals and our “culture” (Marxists will reject this as irrelevant to the proletariat of the third world, and I will agree with that, but it is not irrelevant to Anarchism in general). We must now begin to develop the Anarchist science that will give us a mechanism to apply to various revolutionary contexts.

David Graeber, himself an Anarchist academic, gives a very fair and insightful reasoning behind why the academy and Anarchists don’t tend to get along in *The Twilight of Vanguardism*:

“It’s not just that anarchism does not lend itself to high theory. It’s that it is primarily an ethics of practice; and it insists, before anything else, that one’s means must be consonant with one’s ends; one cannot create freedom through authoritarian means; that as much as possible, one must embody the society one wishes to create.”

I am tempted to agree with any Marxists who believe this to be the core of Anarchist “lifestylism” and our inherent idealism. The idea that if you are not directly attacking the system or building communism, what you are doing is not under the banner of Anarchism. We carry a direct-action “do something now” approach to things, and I too believe in that. I do not however believe that we cannot further develop our theory to make those actions more meaningful.

The Anarchist position against democratic centralism is not that we reject the idea of a “revolutionary minority”, insurrectionist Anarchist Communists have understood this for a long

time. Along with the responsibility to agitate and attack the ruling classes, the insurrectionist knows they are in the minority. Despite this, the Insurrectionist doesn't believe that worker's should be mobilized by organizations during this attack. Platformists believe in the horizontal power built by the vanguard parties, and believe in the ideological unity proposed by vanguardists, yet inevitably find difficulty mobilizing the masses to attack. and make the cross over to the praxis of insurrectionists. This is a serious problem, Anarchists struggle to both build power horizontally and mobilize for attack.

Knowing full well the issues with the common Anarchist mode of organizing, under formal or informal consensus, bears many issues. Most Anarchist organizations lack the ideological unity proposed by Platformists like Mahkno (post-Russian Revolution). To handle contradictions, we are inevitably in need of some sort of empirical method to resolve problems according to Anarchist ideals. Back to the academy we go, I say, but we will not have an academic anarchism developed by a single person. No school of Anarchism has thus far been developed in this manner, and I say that as one of the few people describing themselves today as explicitly Kropotkinist. My revolutionary ideals are unequivocally attributable to Kropotkin's theories of mutual-aid and evolution, and that is the science unique to Anarchism which makes the difference to me.

So, given both my praises for the analysis and strategy of Marxist-Leninists, and the weakness of the Anarchist movement, it is come due-time to address why I still stand for Anarchism. That means I must obviously defend my assertion that stateless mechanisms are *ideal* for both overthrowing the capitalist state and building full-communism, as well as my rejection of "democratic centralism".

Using Lenin's understanding of the state as "the mechanism in which one class oppresses another", Anarchists do not desire to use the tools of the bourgeois state in overthrowing capitalism. We feel systems based of exploitation can only further the

cause of exploitation. We seem them as unfit and ineffective. The idea that we should mobilize revolutionaries into "one true revolution" is certainly a nice ideal I can get behind, but I believe when intellectuals harness the tools of the ruling class, we replicate their bourgeois notions no matter how hard we try not to. When we harness the tools of bourgeois exploitation, we fall upon paternalism in practice, which is a trait of the bourgeois state. Even in understanding Lenin's theoretical "stages of Communism", I find little hope in using the mechanism built by an "irreconcilably and perpetually antagonistic" class as that of our own.

I think the state is as much a means of production, as it is the mechanism in which one class oppresses another. When your relationship to the state changes (I am not saying we should abandon solidarity those working in certain exceptional segments of the state apparatus) to that of the "oppressor of the working class", you have committed a petit-bourgeois form of class traitorship. With all the bourgeois characteristics and privilege adopted by the revolutionary leaders of last century, the Anarchist position can be summed up quite simply: the state corrupts, and the state will always be bourgeois.

We also believe the state to not be unique in it's cultural subversion, the same way capitalism is. Yes, the state is intrinsically tied to capital, this is known from its emergence from the feudal system. We've come under a social hegemony in the bourgeois state, where the state is viewed much like capitalism, life without it seems rather impossible, perhaps more impossible. It's also seen by many as the only path to social change. Capitalism has created a statist phenomenon where property and capital can also be the sources of violence, resulting in a redefining of violence in and of itself. Those who commit violence in defense of property are seen as heroic. Much like capitalist exploitation is covered up with legislative band-aids, the exploitation of the state (such as imperialist wars, military hegemony in foreign affairs, police brutality and austerity mea-