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A number of Marxist-Leninists and other authoritarian leftists have taken it upon themselves to pass down an ancient essay for generations to fellow comrades and newcomers, which has now inevitably been forwarded to this author. Published in 1874, by Friedrich Engels, *'On Authority'* has served as a basis, an argument, and a foundation for why authoritarianism and authoritarian practices are just and unavoidably necessary in the pursuit of the liberation of the proletariat. The essay seeks to outline and refute the criticisms toward the socialist movement in his day, with many sects of anti-authoritarians of the time, and present-day, labeling it authoritarian. While many authoritarians on the left have issued this essay to newcomers and placed it upon a pedestal, that pedestal is fimble and weak, like it were made of straw. When analyzing his arguments today, the only thing Engels' seems to instill in readers is how woefully ignorant, blind, and ultimately unwilling to create mature conversation he is – both on his thoughts of authoritarianism and the positions and arguments of anarchists and libertarian socialists. To be put rather simply, Engels' 1874

essay, is a thought-terminating cliché that is outdated, fallacious, and ultimately a failure of political theory.

Before diving into Engels' work, a definition from the anarchist perspective of the term 'authority' is needed. After much study and analysis, the definition I have constructed goes as such: **A social relation wherein one party possesses the power and/or claims the right to command or forbid, make final decisions, and compel and enforce obedience in others, oftentimes by means of domination, exploitation, violence, and/or coercion.** It is important to note that anarchists tend to use the term as synonymous with domination – those two going hand in hand. However, do not make the mistake to think that authority and domination are inherently intertwined. In short, the use of authority does not always involve domination, but domination is always authoritarian. Now, let us review Engels' definition of 'authority' that he would like to address: *"Authority, in the sense in which the word is used here, means: the imposition of the will of another upon ours..."*. Admittedly, while there is a morsel of validity to what Engels lays out, the definition he provides is ultimately far too nebulous and is simply incomplete; his usage and conception of authority is simply not enough for us to call anything nor anyone 'authoritarian'.

Engels goes on to write, *"Everywhere combined action, the complication of processes dependent upon each other, displaces independent action by individuals. But whoever mentions combined action speaks of organisation; now, is it possible to have organisation without authority? Supposing a social revolution dethroned the capitalists, who now exercise their authority over the production and circulation of wealth. Supposing, to adopt entirely the point of view of the anti-authoritarians, that the land and the instruments of labour had become the collective property of the workers who use them. Will authority have disappeared, or will it only have changed its form? Let us see"*. We can already begin to see glimpses of very fatal

that the anti-authoritarians must be opposed to such things, instead of simply attempting to thoroughly learn about their positions.

In summary; Engels' has a very distorted and misinformed understanding of the arguments of the anti-authoritarians, has no understanding between representation and delegation, cannot discern the difference between different power structures, including self-defense and domination, and ultimately seems to misrepresent and not entirely understand various criticisms and refutations and consequently misguide readers. We can know one of two things if one cites or recommends this essay to readers and young leftists: either they have not read it, because if they have, they would be embarrassed to cite it, or they have read it, agreed with it, and thus they have no understanding of how power functions. Engels' is ultimately a classic authoritarian-minded person he seeks very regimented, hierarchical structures and organization, attempts to erase any distinction and nuance in how different power structures function, wants those who listen to him to fall in line and march in lock-step to the beat of his drum, and ultimately, as a factor owner himself, is attempting to uphold petit bourgeois values; he is reaffirming and reinforcing the ideology of rulers, and therefore is a reactionary.

After a final reading of his work, attempting one final time to view Engels' logic and arguments charitably, I have been left stranded between only two conclusions: either Engels' genuine understanding of authority, authoritarianism, and the anti-authoritarians' arguments is flawed & malnourished, therefore by writing this essay he is causing nothing but confusion, or he is deliberately, dishonestly, and maliciously misrepresenting the arguments, ideals, and the entire movement of the anarchists **in either case, he serves the reaction.**

Engels somehow comes to the conclusion that anti-authoritarians are opposed to revolutionary violence and organization, which is once again a gross misrepresentation of their ideals. Furthermore; he goes on to snobbishly comment, "*Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon — authoritarian means, if such there be at all…*" (Engels). Meanwhile, Bakunin himself actively took part in both an insurrection in Lyon, France in 1870, and an anarchist insurrection in Bologna, Italy. Did Engels' truly think the anarchists and anti-authoritarians were pacifists, or anti-revolutionaries?

Apparently, according to Engels, authority is also, among numerous, incomparable other things, equivalent to the use of force, and therefore any attempt to change social & power structures with utilization of force in any capacity is inherently 'authoritarian'. If this is truly the case, let us ask ourselves this then ⍰ a slave taking reins of the whip and striking down the slavemaster, a battered bride pushing her abusive spouse down the stairs to escape his wrath, a mass population overthrowing their oppressive monarch, oligarchs, or capitalists; surely we cannot deceive ourselves into believing these acts are authoritarian? Revolution is certainly the most anti-authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby an oppressed party uses force and violence in the attempt to defend themselves against an oppressor, relinquishing themselves from abusive, exploitative, and/or coercive relations; yet Engels & various other marxist-leninists seemingly cannot discern the difference. After all, what is the difference between a bourgeois capitalist nation using its police to brutally silence political dissent, and say, the Bolshevik Revolution? Once again, we circle back to the same hallmark flaw of Engels' essay; he attempts to label things as an authority that are not comparable in any way, shape, or form, and then insinuates

flaws with Engels' conception and understanding of the anti-authoritarian methods and arguments. He somehow comes to the conclusion that the anti-authoritarians must be anti-organization and that the process of coming together as a collective to make decisions is somehow authoritarian. The anarchists and libertarian socialists have offered, theoretically, very efficient and ideologically principled & ideologically sound alternatives known as horizontal organization — many anarchists have also specifically suggested confederations of council structures as well. Consistently and constantly, I for one see the anarchists and anti-authoritarians providing new organizational structures that are genuine and better alternatives to hierarchical ones. How Engels comes to the conclusion that coming together and making decisions requires 'authority' and therefore the anti-authoritarians must be opposed to it boggles the mind, truly.

Engels writes, *"Let us take by way of example a cotton spinning mill. The cotton must pass through at least six successive operations before it is reduced to the state of thread, and these operations take place for the most part in different rooms. Furthermore, keeping the machines going requires an engineer to look after the steam engine, mechanics to make the current repairs, and many other labourers whose business it is to transfer the products from one room to another, and so forth. All these workers, men, women and children, are obliged to begin and finish their work at the hours fixed by the authority of the steam, which cares nothing for individual autonomy. The workers must, therefore, first come to an understanding on the hours of work; and these hours, once they are fixed, must be observed by all, without any exception"*. If what Engels means by this is that there are some processes, procedures, organizational structures, modes of production or mechanisms that must be done in a particular way, simply by necessity, then first of all, why does he attempt to call things like these things an 'authority', and secondly, very few would disagree with his statement. If there are some procedures and

mechanisms of production or organization that cannot be done in any other fashion, then so be it, that is simply the way those particular things will have to be done — calling these things like the machines, the spinning mill, or the steam, an 'authority' is absurd. He continues, *"If man, by dint of his knowledge and inventive genius, has subdued the forces of nature, the latter avenge themselves upon him by subjecting him, in so far as he employs them, to a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation. Wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel"*. Engels' is correct to say that these machines create rhythmic necessities that must be carried out in a certain manner for it to function, but this is simply off-topic from what the anarchists and anti-authoritarians are discussing when they oppose authority. Necessity is not authority, simply put. Mikhail Bakunin, one of the most prolific and celebrated anarchists, once said, *"The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognised them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatsoever, divine or human, collective or individual"* (Bakunin).

The anti-authoritarians and anarchists simply suggest that all structures that are developed should be done so in a manner that can be laid out, approved, revised, and revoked, by the very people actively engaged in those processes & structures. While there are certain decisions and processes that most likely will need to be done in one particular manner, overall, it is the people themselves that should have reins over how these structures and decisions are developed and made.

He writes, *"But the necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that, will nowhere be found more evident than on board a ship on the high seas. There, in time of danger, the lives of all depend on the instantaneous and absolute obedience of all to the will of one"* (Engels). There are examples of ships that were manned by crews whom had genuine say in how they carried

out decisions and how they operated — the pirates of the middle 17th & middle 18th centuries often delegated a captain, and the basis of deciding on a captain was done by crew consensus.

When he submitted his arguments to fellow anti-authoritarians, be libertarian socialists or anarchists, he was surely and swiftly shot down, with the anti-authoritarians replying: *"Yes, that's true, but there it is not the case of authority which we confer on our delegates, but of a commission entrusted!"*. Here, the anti-authoritarians are explaining to Engels the difference between representation and delegation. When dealing with authoritarianism, we must confront that the hierarchical power structure is pre-baked into our society, and that it is not something that we can rescind nor reform — those who are in power, and the structure itself, cannot be recalled. With delegation, certain peoples are entrusted with responsibilities and tasks by their fellow man, and their power and/or position in a certain role can be revoked at will by the people — those who we delegate are not set in stone into their position. Remember that a key part of anarchist & anti-authoritarian societal organization is bottom-up control. Engels arrogantly replies, *"These gentlemen think that when they have changed the names of things they have changed the things themselves. This is how these profound thinkers mock at the whole world"* (Engels). Here we see what is, in brutal honesty, a resounding cry of arrogant confidence. He cries out that these thinkers are simply moving the goal-post, yet he is the one who has perverted the definition of 'authority' to be this nebulous totality that cannot be escaped, and therefore it is impossible to combat. Sadly, this is a classic, sly tactic that authoritarians often use — distorting and broadening terms to the point where accurate conversation and debate can no longer be had. In true authoritarian-minded fashion, instead of taking the time to thoroughly and honestly analyze the theory and arguments, he instead writes it off completely.