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# A Reply to the International Socialist Organization

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2009

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Like most libertarian socialists nowadays, I think the CNT's failure to overthrow the Generalitat when it had the opportunity was a mistake. And it's quite possible that a number of the Spanish anarchosyndicalists were unclear in their thinking, or swayed by fears and risks. Thus the Friends of Durruti later criticized the CNT for being unable to work up the audacity to make the most of the opportunities. But, again, this doesn't show that anarchosyndicalism or libertarian socialism are opposed to political power, as the ISO maintains. The real issue is about the nature of political power, the state, and mass empowerment.

Nowadays there are those like John Holloway — a libertarian Marxist writer — who argue it is possible "to change the world without taking power." I think this is best understood as a reaction against the failure of various forms of statist socialism — both social-democracy and Leninism. But as long as power remains in the hands of the dominating classes, the majority of the population won't be free, but will continue to be dominated and exploited. It's hard to see how the self-emanipation of the oppressed and exploited can take place except through gaining control over the decisions that affect them. And this needs to happen not only in workplaces but through figuring out a way to evolve governance of public affairs from the hierarchical state to a form of popular power, directly controlled by the population. But precisely because liberation requires social empowerment of the majority, capturing the state isn't a plausible route as the state is the wrong kind of institution for popular self-management of public affairs. A different form of polity is needed.

## Part 1: Individualism, Social Anarchism and Leninism

I was prompted to write this by Paul D'Amato's two recent articles in *Socialist Worker* criticizing anarchism ("Refusing to be ruled over"), and ("The Marxist view of the state") but this will also give me the opportunity to provide an explanation of some basic social anarchist ideas.

I believe there is, as Murray Bookchin said, an "unbridgeable chasm" between social anarchism and individualist or "lifestylist" forms of anarchism. Ideas often thought characteristic of anarchism, such as anti-organizational bias or an obsession for "consensus decision-making" are in fact features of individualist anarchism, not social anarchism.

Libertarian socialists would also agree there is an unbridgeable chasm between Leninism and libertarian socialism. The ISO is a Leninist organization in that it defends the political legacy of the Bolshevik party's role in the Russian revolution, looks to Bolshevik leaders like Lenin and Trotsky for inspiration, and defends characteristic Leninist ideas such as the theory of a "vanguard party" to manage the transition to socialism, and the idea of building a hierarchical "proletarian state" in the period of social transformation away from capitalism.

D'Amato's criticisms of those who think of social change in terms of one's personal lifestyle choices make it clear he is taking aim at lifestyle or individualist anarchism. But D'Amato presents his criticisms as if they apply to anarchism in general. Leninist polemics have a long history of using individualist anarchism as a club to beat up on libertarian socialism...a kind of bait and switch fallacy. This method of argument would be analogous to me suggesting that there is no distinction between the form of Leninism advocated by the ISO and the despotic regime of Joseph Stalin. In fact I won't do this because I'm aware that the ISO has a long history of critiquing

existing (and formerly existing) Communist systems. I would suggest that Paul D'Amato and the ISO need to offer the same courtesy to social anarchism, by not confusing it with hyper-individualism or lifestyleism.

### **Self-emancipation and Direct Democracy**

Social anarchism is a socialist political viewpoint, and emerged originally as a tendency in the first International Working Men's Association (called the "First International") of the 1860s-70s. People like Anselmo Lorenzo and Michael Bakunin were prominent figures in that initial libertarian socialist current. Thus social anarchism or libertarian socialism — I use these phrases interchangeably — was a product of radical working class politics.

The libertarian socialists in the First International agreed with Marx that "the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves."

This slogan was first announced by Flora Tristan y Moscoso — a pioneer socialist-feminist of the 1830s-40s. Tristan made her living as a printer. She had originally been a follower of socialists like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, who advocated building alternative communities, and they relied on philanthropy from wealthy people for funding — an approach that suffered from both paternalism and lack of realism. This was the approach that Engels later called "utopian socialism." By the early 1840s Tristan had repudiated utopian socialism. She came to the view that the working class could only rely on its own efforts. In 1843 she embarked on a nation-wide speaking tour to persuade French workers to form a national workers union, and her statement about working class self-emancipation dates from that campaign.

Libertarian socialists in the First International thus agreed with Marx in rejecting the approach of the utopian socialists.

July, at the time of the defeat of the army takeover attempt. And in his memoir Joan Garcia Oliver...who argued in July 1936 for overthrowing the Generalitat...mentions that Federica Montseny argued that trying to carry out the CNT's libertarian socialist program right then would require an "anarchist dictatorship."

First of all, it should be pointed out that Montseny was a Stirnerite individualist which would be likely to prejudice her against any proposal of constructing a social governing power. Secondly, Garcia Oliver responded to her in the union debate at the time that a takeover of authority in the region by highly democratic mass union organizations with the backing of a majority of the working class cannot reasonably be called a "dictatorship." This debate took place before the widespread seizures of industry by Spain's workers, which strengthened the working class sense of potential power.

The debate was argued in front of a union regional plenary of over 500 delegates. At that moment the outcome of the initial struggle with the army was unclear. And anarchists opposed to overthrowing the Generalitat appealed to fear and uncertainty. Friends of Durruti argued later that the success of these appeals to fear and doubt show insufficient preparation within the CNT movement in thinking about how to respond to this situation as well as lack of appreciation of the importance of taking advantage of opportunities. This may be true, but it doesn't show that their anarchosindicalist ideology was the explanation of the failure. Nor did Friends of Durruti believe that it was even though they were critical of confusions in the thinking of some anarchists.

Moreover, by August Garcia Oliver and other revolutionaries in the CNT had worked out the National Defense Council proposal, which answered the "anarchist dictatorship" charge by proposing a government of the entire organized working class, not just the CNT.

position to direct social governance by the people themselves or popular politicization or the politics of mass struggle. The revolutionary politics of the CNT was also a form of politics. Thus the label "apolitical" is misleading...and this is why social anarchists and anarchosyndicalists no longer use it.

The CNT unions were run through the direct democracy of worker assemblies, and elected committees of *delegados* (shop stewards). But the Spanish anarchists also emphasized *capacitacion* — building among ordinary people the skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively. Thus the Spanish anarchists also built a network of neighborhood social centers where a variety of activities took place — study groups, debates, cultural events, Mujeres Libres (the anarchist women's organization) groups, and so on. The Spanish anarchists were oriented to organizing in the community and around areas of consumption as well as in the workplace — as shown by the huge rent strike in Barcelona in 1931. The CNT's program of empowering residents of communities through the "free municipalities" falls out of this aspect of Spanish anarchosyndicalism.

If the anarchosyndicalists had merely organized the unions, various conservative or authoritarian or bureaucratic tendencies in the working class would tend to gain dominance in the unions over time. The libertarian socialists could only sustain their influence through popular education and politicization.

Bailey's article quotes various anarchists about "not wanting to create an anarchist dictatorship" as the explanation for not overthrowing the government. But this was a justification that was concocted *later*, after they had joined the Popular Front government. As a result of that action the CNT was criticized by anarchosyndicalists in other countries. It was only at this time that the CNT started talking about "not wanting to create a dictatorship". It was an after-the-fact justification tailored to appeal to anarchist sentiments.

Now, it's true that the CNT in Catalonia could have destroyed the regional Generalitat government of Catalonia in

From the time of the First International to the 1930s, the main movement-building or mass organizing expression of social anarchism was in the labor movement...an approach to labor politics called anarcho-syndicalism. Anarchosyndicalists take Flora Tristan's slogan about working class self-liberation quite literally. Anarchosyndicalists believe that the working class can liberate itself from structures of oppression and exploitation by developing, "from below," its own mass social movement based on a wide-spread solidarity in the course of struggles with the dominating classes.

That working class liberation develops out of the class struggle is thus an assumption shared by both Marxism and anarchosyndicalism — and most social anarchists.

Through self-organization and their own collective action, working people can develop a sense of having some collective power to change things, develop deeper insights into the nature of the system, and develop skills useful in advancing the struggle further. Through collective action and self-organization people can develop a greater sense of possibilities for change. The practical need for unity also helps in developing an understanding of the connections between capitalism and things like racism and sexism and imperialism. A mass organization is also a site where radicals with ambitious ideas about social change can connect to the aspirations and grievances of broader numbers of people.

The anarchosyndicalist advocacy of the direct democracy of worker assemblies comes from this idea of workers controlling and shaping — self-managing — their own collective struggles. This conception of a movement of workers "in union" with each other is opposed to bureaucratic business unionism, where a hierarchical structure of paid officials and staff becomes entrenched, and routine top-down bargaining narrows the issues and scope of the union's aims and diminishes the ability of the union to address the concerns of workers on and off the job. A paid union hierarchy who don't share the condi-

tions of the job and often have incomes more akin to management are likely to "see management's point of view" and will tend to see direct struggle as a risk to the union they would rather avoid.

The point to direct democracy comes from the fact it is the opposite of top-down control. The six-month fight of the Barcelona bus drivers to reduce their work week from six to five days in 2007-2008 illustrates this.

The bureaucratic unions at the Barcelona transit authority — the social-democratic UGT and Communist-influenced Workers Commissions — had sold out the workers on this demand for a shorter workweek in 2005 by signing a contract without a well-advertised contract ratification meeting.

In the fall of 2007 the anarcho-syndicalist CGT ([www.cgt.org.es](http://www.cgt.org.es)), which has a large section among the bus drivers, was able to persuade another independent bus drivers union (Spain has a system of "competitive unionism" that allows multiple unions in a workplace) to join it in sponsoring an open workers assembly "independent of the trade unions," to discuss the issues and plan a course of action.

Workers welcomed the rank and file of the UGT and Workers Commissions to attend, but not the paid officials. The assembly elected a rank and file committee to coordinate the struggle and publish a free newspaper for people in the city to explain their struggle. Over a period of six months the assembly conducted three strikes of several days duration, various demonstrations and marches, and gained the participation of a majority of the workers. After the third strike, the Socialist Party politicians who control the city government and transit authority in Barcelona finally capitulated to the workers' demand.

The direct democracy of the workers assembly was crucial because it placed power over the struggle directly in the hands of the ranks, and gave bus drivers a real sense this was their

- Control of local governance by the "free municipalities."<sup>(10)</sup>

All of these planks were part of the national CNT program in September 1936.

It's worth noting that the CNT resisted going along with the strategy of uniting through the Popular Front government longer than any other Left tendency in Spain. The POUM — another Left Marxist group — was already part of the Popular Front government in Catalonia in July of 1936, the Communist Party were the strongest advocates for the Popular Front strategy, and the various Socialist Party factions were onboard the Popular Front by August 1936 at least. Thus the *Marxist* groups were actually the main backers of exactly the strategy that the ISO criticizes. If mistakes by anarchists in the Spanish revolution is an argument against anarchosyndicalism, why aren't mistakes of Marxists an argument against Marxism? In fact I would suggest that the orientation of Marxism to the politics of parties and elections best explains their agreement to a Popular Front alliance that favored retaining hierarchical state power and protection for the privileges and position of the Spanish "middle classes."

But my main point here is to show that the ISO is simply wrong when they say the anarchosyndicalists were not for working class political power in the Spanish revolution. Again, it's a question of what working class empowerment means. For libertarian socialists it doesn't mean a political party capturing control of a state, and then building up an administrative apparatus controlling the economy.

Bailey claims that anarchosyndicalist "apoliticism" meant they abandoned "political struggle." The word "apolitical" was used by some syndicalists to refer to the opposition to electoral politics and the politics of parties and states. It doesn't mean op-

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<sup>(10)</sup> "Hacia una revolucion nueva"



But Caballero and the Left Socialist leadership of the UGT refused the CNT proposal. Caballero described the CNT proposal as a "leap outside the constitution." Caballero had been strongly warned against the proposal by the Soviet ambassador in Spain.

This created an internal crisis for the CNT in Catalonia. What would be their solution? According to Durruti's biographer, Abel Paz, Durruti proposed a strategy of the CNT unions taking power in the regions where the CNT was the majority — Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Murcia (the east coast region of Spain). By creating "facts on the ground," Durruti believed it was possible to force Caballero and the UGT to go along.

Many of the FAI activists among the rank and file leadership level of the CNT in Catalonia apparently began to waver. Perhaps some thought Durruti's strategy was too risky. Perhaps others thought being in control of the industries gave them enough power to pressure the government. Others were worried about being frozen out of government decisions that would affect their militias and expropriated industries.

Thus, the CNT union finally joined the Popular Front government in November. Because the CNT journalists, Liberto Callejas and Jaime Balius, were totally opposed to joining the Popular Front government, they were fired.

Callejas and Balius then decided on a strategy of appealing to the rank and file of the CNT, to re-assert the original anarcho-syndicalist program. This led them to help organize the Friends of Durruti Group in March 1937. Balius was the main theorist and writer for the Friends of Durruti.

Thus the Friends of Durruti group was not formed to abandon or break with the anarchosyndicalist program of the CNT, but to organize for its revival among the ranks of the union. The Friends' program had three planks:

- A National Defense Junta to run a unified militia.
- Worker self-management of industry

movement. It gave them the power to decide if a management proposal was acceptable or not.

Direct democracy does not mean all decisions have to be made in meetings. It doesn't mean there can be no delegation of tasks. But the idea is to avoid the development of a bureaucracy that has its own interests apart from the workers. Thus in the CGT Transport Union there are no paid officials and there is term limits for the executive committees.

Anarchosyndicalists have almost never advocated "consensus decision-making" for the mass organizations they have helped to organize or participate in — and this is true of most social anarchists in general. The interminable meetings and difficulty coming to clear decisions in a reasonable time — invariably a feature of consensus decision-making in settings with large numbers of people — would not be effective for working class people who have limited amounts of free time and are often exhausted from work. It's particularly unlikely to work for working women who often have a "double day" — working for employers and also doing most housework for their families.

Part of the problem here, I think, is that people may confuse what works for a small, informal circle of like-minded friends and what is needed in a larger and more heterogeneous group of people. A small informal group of friends can make decisions through talking things out. But a social movement is not the same thing as a small group of like-minded friends.

Building consensus in a mass organization or movement is important. The more unified a movement is, the stronger it will be. This suggests that there does need to be an open discussion where people can air their views. But if discussion doesn't end disagreement, then libertarian socialists propose a vote, and the majority carries the decision. Thus it is majoritarian direct democracy that social anarchists advocate, not "consensus decision-making." D'Amato ignores this distinction between different concepts of direct democracy.

The problem with "consensus decision-making" is its requirement of complete unanimity, and opposition to voting. I agree with Paul D'Amato's criticism of consensus decision-making of the sort that existed in the '70s/'80s period in anti-nuke groups like the Livermore Action Group or the Clamshell Alliance. Howard Ryan's pamphlet "Blocking Progress" ([conexions.org/CxLibrary/CX6187.htm](http://conexions.org/CxLibrary/CX6187.htm)) is good account of how destructive and elitist this was in the Livermore Action Group in the '80s. But consensus decision making in those groups did not have its origins in social anarchism, but in Quakers and other radical pacifists, radical feminists, and individualist anarchists. Jo Freeman's famous essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" was a critique of this approach to decision-making in radical feminist groups of that era.

Consensus decision-making tends to lead to minority rule and empowers people who are better at talking...who are usually more educated. In any movement there is always a minority who agrees with the original aims and character of an organization. So even if this is proven dysfunctional from experience, the group can't evolve through learning from experience because changes can be blocked by small minorities. This is why consensus decision-making is essentially conservative.

## Persons and Social Groups

Why is there this difference between individualist anarchism and social anarchism in the interpretation of direct democracy? I believe the explanation for this lies in a theoretical difference about the concept of the person.

Individualist anarchism was influenced by the classical liberal conception of the person as a kind of atom whose core personality or identity is separate from social groups. The idea of absolute personal autonomy, which is a feature of hyper-individualism, is built on this.

and the professional/managerial classes would be excluded from the government. The various Marxist parties would be represented through their working class members in the UGT union.

Another prominent supporter of the National Defense Council proposal was Liberto Callejas, managing editor of the CNT's big daily paper in Barcelona, *Solidaridad Obrera*. Most of the journalists on that paper supported this program, including a disabled journalist named Jaime Balius. Throughout September and October the writers at *Solidaridad Obrera* carried out a vigorous campaign in support of the National Defense Council proposal.

The main group the anarcho-syndicalists were hoping to ally with were the left wing of the Socialist Party — the largest Marxist tendency in Spain to the left of the Communist Party. In the summer of 1936 the Left Socialists were in the leadership of the massive UGT farm workers union and controlled the national executive committee of the UGT union federation. In months leading up to the onset of the revolution in Spain in 1936, the Left Socialists had called for a "proletarian revolution" and a "workers' government."

There was already a strong alliance in the countryside between UGT and CNT farm worker unions. The UGT and CNT railway and public utility unions had jointly seized and expropriated the country's railway and utility systems.

At the beginning of September the leading figure among the Left Socialists, Largo Caballero, had just been made Prime Minister. The UGT union federation incorporated only slightly less than half the organized working class in Spain. Agreement of the UGT and the Prime Minister to the CNT proposal would have added greatly to its legitimacy. Knowing that Caballero was something of a prima donna, the CNT proposed that Caballero be made President of the proposed revolutionary government.

”Essentially the CNT’s message was, ‘We refuse to unite in struggle with workers who have yet to march under our banner.’”

Now, in fact this is the opposite of what the ”workers alliance” proposal was about. It was, after all, a proposal for an alliance with the socialist UGT unions. And it’s also true that the CNT proposal for a national defense council was a proposal for representation only of worker organizations, not political parties.

The character of the government they were proposing is clear if you look at what happened in Aragon, the one region where they did carry this out. In September of 1936 more than 400 collectivized villages formed a regional federation and held a congress where they elected an Aragon Regional Defense Council...essentially a workers’ government. Initially all the elected representatives were members of the CNT, which had 80 percent of the union members in that region, but later some UGT members were added to the Council. Although the CNT was dominant in most of the collectivized villages, there were some villages where the UGT was the majority.

A prominent supporter of the CNT National Defense Council proposal at the time was Eduardo de Guzman, editor of the CNT’s daily newspaper in Madrid, *Castilla Libre*. De Guzman described the proposal as

”a proletarian government — total working-class democracy in which all sectors of the proletariat — but of the proletariat alone — would be represented.”<sup>(9)</sup>

By excluding the Basque Nationalist Party and the Republican parties, the parties representing Spanish small business

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<sup>(9)</sup> Interview with Eduardo de Guzmán, early 1970s, in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, 186 and 335-336.

Individuals are viewed as prior to society because society and social groups are viewed as akin to associations that a person joins, such as a club or church or a union. This picture was influenced by the classical liberal concept of society being formed as a ”social contract” among individuals. This is the source of individualist anarchist talk of society being based on ”free agreement” or ”voluntary association”. Because the individual is conceived as an atom prior to society, the individual is seen as requiring an absolute autonomy apart from the social collectivity...and this is expressed in the requirement of unanimity in collective decisions that person participates in. The individual ego thus asserts its claim to veto the collectivity on its own. William Godwin expresses this thus: ”There is but one power to which I can yield a heartfelt obedience, the decision of my own understanding, the dictates of my own conscience.”

The individualist conception comes close to agreeing with Margaret Thatcher’s slogan, ”Society doesn’t exist, only individuals exist.” The individualist concept of the person is an assumption that individualist anarchism shares in common with right-wing ”free market” ”libertarianism”.

But in fact society — and many social groups — are not like an association. When you’re born into a particular social class, or a particular racial or ethnic group, or a family, or you’re a particular sex raised in a particular gender system, this shapes who you become. Many of your abilities, expectations in life, tastes, way of talking and other things are shaped by being a part of a social group. Social groups become part of your identity. The social group is part of you. And this also means that people will often have a tendency to agree or sympathize with needs of a group they are a part of.

This view of the person as shaped by groups he or she is a part of is called the social concept of the person. The social concept of the person is another assumption shared in common by Marx and social anarchism.

Bakunin is expressing his agreement with this view of the person in this passage:

”Even the most wretched individual of our present society could not exist and develop without the cumulative social efforts of countless generations. Thus the individual, his freedom and reason, are the products of society, and not the vice versa: society is not the product of individuals comprising it; and the higher, the more fully the individual is developed, the greater his freedom – and the more he is the product of society, the more does he receive from society and the greater his debt to it.”<sup>1</sup>

This doesn’t mean each individual isn’t also unique, with his or her own aspirations and ability to make up one’s own mind.

It might help to contrast the social concept of the person with another view that I’ll call the totalitarian concept of the person. This is a view that is very far out of fashion these days. But in the ’20s and ’30s, in both fascist and Stalinist rhetoric, there was a tendency to reduce the needs and interests and aspirations of the person to some larger entity such as a class, the nation or the state. The person was seen as a mere expression of some collectivity. The social concept of the person stands mid-way between the two extremes of individualism and totalitarianism, acknowledging both an individual and collective aspect to people.

Because our lives occur in various group contexts, there are always situations where our will will be limited by the wills of others, and by our obligations to others. Thus the slogan ”refusing to be ruled over” (the title of one of D’Amato’s articles) is ambiguous. It could express an opposition to being subordi-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*, 5-6.

health care. At the same time, there would also be worker assemblies in the workplaces and self-management of industries by the people who work in them.

The anarchists in Catalonia had also entered into negotiations with the Moroccan Action Committee...a national liberation group. The anarchists proposed that they would work to get Spain to declare Spanish Morocco free and provide arms if the Moroccans would send native speakers to Spain to do propaganda directed at the fascist army’s Moroccan troops.

Now it should be obvious that a structure that can make rules for the society and has enforcement powers is a polity or government. From the Spanish anarchist point of view, this would not be a state because of the direct control over the armed militia – the main armed body in society – by the organized working class, and also because of the transfer of legislative power to the grassroots congresses and the direct worker management of the economy. The people’s militia would be close to what Engels called a ”self-acting armed body of the population.”

A leading advocate of the National Defense Council program was Buenaventura Durruti, the most popular elected militia leader in Aragon. Durruti and others in the CNT had been advocating a ”revolutionary workers alliance” with the UGT unions for several years. Geoff Bailey quotes Durruti on the workers’ alliance this way:

”The alliance, to be revolutionary, must be genuinely working class. It must be the result of an agreement between the workers’ organizations, and those alone. No party, however socialist it may be, can belong to the workers’ alliance.”

Then, Bailey interprets this as follows:

- Replacement of the separate party and union militias with a unified people's militia controlled through a National Defense Council made up of CNT and UGT union delegates. This would replace the Republican central government. The parliament would be replaced by national and regional worker congresses. The Defense Council would not have power over the economy but would be limited to military, police and judicial functions.<sup>(8)</sup>
- Direct management of all industries by the workers in a socialized economy. Seizure of the banks. Coordinated planning through the worker congresses.
- Replacement of hierarchical municipal governments by "free municipalities", based on neighborhood and village assemblies, and delegate councils elected from the assemblies for larger towns and cities.

The CNT proposal for a National Defense Council is the origin of the Friends of Durruti Group proposal which they sometimes called a "revolutionary junta." *Junta* is just the Spanish word meaning "council" — it doesn't have any authoritarian connotations in Spanish. The executive committees of CNT unions were called *juntas*.

The CNT's program for a self-managed socialist structure is based on what I would call the "dual governance" model. This is the idea that decision-making and popular self-management should be rooted in both the workplace and the community. The "free municipalities" were intended to be both the local governance body as well as the channel for consumer input, particularly around public goods like housing, education and

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and errors other than those I mention.

<sup>(8)</sup> The September 3 Defense Council proposal is discussed in Cesar M. Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas y el poder*.

nate to bosses, to oppressive hierarchies...or it could express the idea of individual autonomy, of not being subject to any limitation by others. This second interpretation is the individualist anarchist idea of absolute individual autonomy. But a person is not oppressed simply because they lose a vote in a meeting.

## Direct Democracy and Self-management

For anarchosyndicalism, self-management and direct democracy are aspects of both the strategy for social change and also part of the program for a self-managed socialist society. The direct self-activity and self-organization of the working class, in running their own struggles and mass organizations, "prefigures" a society where workers will directly govern their own work and the industries they work in. "Prefigurative politics" thus had its origins in the libertarian syndicalist wing of labor radicalism.

In the social anarchist view, self-management is an innate human capacity and need. Humans have the ability to discuss among themselves, develop plans for what they want to achieve, for themselves and jointly with others, and have the ability to develop skills and tools and coordination needed to realize their purposes in real time. Self-management is part of the idea of "positive" freedom. The liberal concept of freedom as absence of external coercion or constraint, which is what right-wing "libertarians" mean by "freedom," is viewed by social anarchists as only part of what real freedom is. "Positive" freedom requires also that people have roughly equal access to the means to participate effectively in the spheres of decision-making that affect their lives.

We can think of self-management of industry as a layered or nested structure of spheres of decision-making. Where groups of people are mainly affected by some sphere of decision-making, there are assemblies there that institution-

alize collective control. Some decisions affect an entire plant in a roughly equal way, and there are general assemblies of the whole plant to control those decisions. Other decisions affect mainly one department or a small work group, and they have their separate meetings. Some decisions affect only one person and that person gets to "call the shots" in that area. Collective self-management doesn't mean that all decisions are made in meetings or that delegation of tasks doesn't occur. The point to the direct democracy of the assemblies is that it acts as the control for collective self-management.

Nor is self-management simply equivalent to a system of formal democracy. Existing corporate capitalism generates hierarchies where expertise and decision-making authority is concentrated...hierarchies of managers and high-end professionals who work closely with them, such as engineers and lawyers. This hierarchy is part of how class oppression strips from workers their ability to control their lives. The ability of people to effectively participate in decisions that affect them requires also a change in the educational system and the design of work, so that conceptual and decision-making tasks in work are re-integrated with the physical doing of the work. Thus Kropotkin advocated "integration of labor": "A society where each individual is a producer of both manual and intellectual work."

But the point to the direct democracy of the assemblies is that they are needed as a replacement for the formal hierarchical power of dominating classes, the formal subordination of workers in social production.

I need to make three additional points about workers self-management of industry as this occurs in the thinking of most social anarchists.

First: The anarchosyndicalist view of workers self-management is that it arises in the transformation of society, out of the conflict between classes.

the CNT-FAI. The anarchists believed such a state would be a dictatorship, a mortal blow to their antistatist principles."<sup>(7)</sup>

In fact the CNT *did* propose the creation of a working class government (as I will describe shortly). Moreover, as CNT historian Jose Peirats points out, it was always the view of the Spanish anarchosyndicalists that "all social power should be in the hands of the proletariat." The Friends of Durruti Group advocated the formation of a workers government, a "Revolutionary Junta." Trotskyists see this as a break from the position of the CNT.

This is quite wrong. In fact the Friends of Durruti Group were advocating within the rank and file for a return to the official position of the CNT before it joined the Popular Front government in November 1936. From the time of the initial defeat of the army in July of 1936 through August there was an intense debate inside the CNT's unions in Catalonia on the way forward.

By August the Spanish Communist Party was beating the drum for the construction of a conventional hierarchical army...the sort of army Trotsky had put together in the spring of 1918 during the Russian revolution. The Communists had a two-stage strategy of revolution: first gain control of a rebuilt hierarchical army and police, and later use that to seize power and create a nationalized economy. In late August revolutionaries in the CNT unions in Catalonia developed a counter-strategy to head off the Communist Party plan. They got the CNT national union to agree to their plan at a national conference on September 3, 1936. So what was the September program of the anarchosyndicalists? They had been calling for a "revolutionary workers alliance" with the UGT for some time. In September the CNT's program consisted of essentially three pieces:

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<sup>(7)</sup> Geoff Bailey, "Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War", *International Socialist Review*, July-August 2002. Bailey's article contains many distortions

contested concept and the kind of "democracy" one has in mind is crucial.

Leninists seem to imagine that you can consolidate decision-making power in a state administrative layer and then expect that they will easily give up power later. But any group that acquires the position of a dominating class is likely to work to keep their power and privilege and to also develop an ideology to justify their position...and they can easily call it "socialism". We have the former Communist regimes to remind us of this.

### **Leninist Myths About the Spanish Revolution**

D'Amato repeats the usual Trotskyist myth-making about the Friends of Durruti Group in the Spanish revolution who he describes as follows: "They were a group of revolutionary anarchists who became critical of the main anarchist trade union group, the CNT, for refusing to take state power even though they had control in the streets of some of Spain's biggest cities after a workers' uprising in 1936 had successfully thwarted a fascist coup, leaving the bourgeois government still clinging to power." Of course, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists would say they were not for "state power." But, again, this comes back to the point I made earlier, about how libertarian socialists advocate a form of political power that isn't a state.

The CNT (National Confederation of Labor) was Spain's largest union federation, a massive anarcho-syndicalist organization with more than 2 million members.

Usually Trotskyists say that the anarcho-syndicalists didn't believe in the working class acquiring political power at all. Thus Geoff Bailey, in the ISO's journal *International Socialist Review*, writes: "If the government were overthrown, however, it would have to be replaced by a workers' government led by

It's hard to see how an end to the oppression and exploitation of people as workers could come to an end except through a general takeover of the management of social production and distribution by the people who work in these industries. This doesn't mean, however, that anarcho-syndicalism conceives of a socialized economy as the same as the existing economy, but with workers running the workplaces. Rather, the idea is that an entirely different logic of development would ensue, and the technologies used and mix of products and services would change.

The syndicalist strategy is different than the Proudhonian idea of forming worker cooperatives within the cracks of the present capitalist framework. Most social anarchists support alternative institutions such as worker and housing cooperatives and social centers and so on, both because they are useful for the social movements at the present time, and because they illustrate that workers' management is an idea that works. However, forming cooperatives in the cracks of capitalism is not the same as the syndicalist strategy, which is rooted in the class struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Second: Most social anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists do not advocate an ideal of workers self-management in the form of competing cooperatives in a market-driven economy, but as part of a socialized economy in which the land and means of production would be owned in common by the whole society. In 1936, during the Spanish revolution, the anarcho-syndicalist theorist Diego Abad de Santillan wrote that the worker organizations controlling the various industries are not "proprietors" of the industries but are "only administrators at the service of the entire society."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marxists are often confused on this point. For example, in his new book *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Erik Olin Wright identifies the Proudhonian strategy as "the anarchist strategy."

<sup>3</sup> Abad Diego de Santillan, statement from December, 1936, appended to the 1937 addition of *After the Revolution*, 121.

Third: Although most social anarchists still advocate workers self-management of industry as part of a larger program for social transformation and social empowerment, workers self-management of industry was not all there is to what anarchosyndicalism advocated historically for social transformation nor is it all that social anarchists advocate today, far from it.

The power of the dominating classes isn't limited to the workplaces, and struggles that affect working class people spread out in other areas of society — struggles of tenants, for immigrant rights, against police brutality, and so on. To develop its power the working class needs to address the issues of the day and counter its own solutions to those of the dominating classes.

Also, struggles of working people are not just around class because working class people are women, immigrants, people of color. Various forms of oppression and exploitation overlap in a society built on a complex forms of structural inequality.

Thus the overwhelming focus on class oppression and exploitation, which was characteristic of both Marxism and social anarchism in the 19th century and early 1900s, has evolved into an understanding of oppression and exploitation as more multifaceted. The workplace is only one site of conflict and movement-building.

Thus, for example, in its response to the present global capitalist crisis, the CGT — the Spanish anarchosyndicalist union — proposes to tighten and deepen its relationships with the various social movements in Spain — women's groups, ecologists, the housing movement, immigrants rights, and so on. Thus they see the struggle against the elite imposing the costs of the crisis on the working class as built on the basis of a labor/social movement alliance.

The idea of self-emancipation applies in general to all oppressed and exploited people, and the various forms of oppression also generate forms of self-activity and movements in op-

The idea of the "vanguard party" is that it concentrates certain key kinds of expertise...such as a correct Marxist theoretical understanding...and is to act as the manager of the process of change. This concept is a kind of meritocratic ideology, and seems quite consistent with the kind of concentration of decision-making authority and expertise characteristic of a coordinator class.

The activists in the mainstream of the Bolshevik Party may have been well-intended but often human actions have unintended consequences. The point here is to see the consequences of the institutional moves and decisions that fell out of of Bolshevik politics in that situation. This helps us to understand the real meaning of that politics.

I think an empowered coordinator elite is prefigured by various features of Leninism...hierarchical state authority, nationalization of the economy, centralized state planning, the ideology of the "vanguard party." The consolidation of dominant coordinator class through the Russian revolutionary process is best explained as the result of these assumptions in Leninist politics.

In *The Case for Socialism*, Alan Maass — an ISO writer — advocates "democratic planning." This is a vague phrase. Most libertarian socialists also advocate something that could be called "democratic planning." But is this to be a planning process that is controlled from below, starting in the workplace and neighborhood assemblies, or is to be central planning, planning through a statist hierarchy? Maass doesn't say, but his highlighting Bolshevik practice in the Russian revolution as a model suggests that "democratic planning" is a euphemism for statist central planning. Perhaps he would say this would be planning through a "democratic state." But what is "democratic"? Do working class people in the USA feel we're empowered because we can vote every few years for politicians who ignore our concerns? Democracy is a



Centralized state planning for the Soviet economy was begun in November 1917 with the creation of the Supreme Council of National Economy, which became the Soviet planning agency Gosplan in the late '20s. The people on this council were various Bolshevik party members and trade union officials and experts, all appointed from above.

By 1918 Lenin and Trotsky were beating the drum for the adoption of Taylorist methods in industry and "one-man management"...appointment of bosses from above. Appointment of bosses from above is consistent with the logic of central planning. The central planners will want to have people on site in workplaces that can ensure adherence to the plans handed down from above.

Even election of industry management boards by workers was intensely opposed by Lenin and Trotsky. A large faction of rank and file Bolshevik trade union members had proposed election of management boards in early 1921, after the end of the Russian civil war, and this was fought out at the March 1921 party congress. Trotsky argued against it, saying "the party's birth right to rule takes precedence over the passing whims of the worker democracy."

If the party's "right to rule" isn't based on the "worker democracy" where does it come from? I think here the concept of the "vanguard party" comes into play. If you view control by the "vanguard party" as essential for constructing socialism, then this can become a rationalization for abrogating worker democracy.

From the libertarian socialist view, what is essential for constructing authentic socialism is the direct social empowerment of the oppressed and exploited population. This falls directly out of the idea that the "emancipation of the working class is the work of the workers themselves." How can this social empowerment happen if workers are still subordinate to a hierarchical managerial regime?

position. Thus the picture of the agent of social transformation becomes more complex, as it requires an alliance among the various oppressed and exploited groups, as they confront the power of the dominating classes. The framework for this conflict is a class framework, but the working class movement itself requires a mass alliance in the spirit of "An injury to one is the concern of all," if it is to have the unity and social strength to push aside extremely powerful and entrenched elites.

## Part 2: Social Anarchism, Leninism and the State

D'Amato claims that Marxism aims at a stateless society in the future, and this is a fair statement of Marx's view.

But the disagreement between Leninism and social anarchism isn't over some statement about a far-off state of society but about the means to social change, and in particular the means to liberation of the mass of the people from oppression and exploitation.

The state, as Engels wrote, is a territorial power, "standing above society", equipped with an armed "public force" that is not simply "a self-acting armed organization of the people". Engels viewed the state as an institution of a dominating class: "As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which by its means becomes also the politically dominant class and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class."<sup>(1)</sup>

Thus far, the social anarchist current in the late 19th century who emerged out of the First International agreed with Engels on this view of the state. Thus Bakunin wrote:

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<sup>(1)</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 229-230.

”The State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: the priesthood, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and finally, after every other class has been exhausted, the bureaucratic class.”

But if a state is separated from effective control of the mass of the people, how could there be a ”proletarian state”, as Leninists maintain?

Although extreme individualists also oppose the state, they do so for different reasons than social anarchists. Both Bakunin and Kropotkin were scornful of the opposition to the state by 19th century free market capitalist ideologues. They saw this as simply expressing the wish of the capitalist to avoid social constraints on profit making. Their talk of ”freedom” was about the freedom of the capitalists to exploit the working class.

Social anarchists oppose the state for two main reasons: because it is an institution of class domination, and because it is a structure of hierarchical power, a structure of domination in its own right.

The characteristic feature of the modern state is its separation from effective control by the mass of the people. The state is built on hierarchical chain of command structures, similar to the private corporations, with a concentration of expertise and decision-making authority into a minority.

In corporate capitalism there is a social layer that is the systems’ control bureaucracy. Their class position isn’t based on capital ownership but on relative monopoly of decision-making authority and expertise in managing state agencies or corporations. If we wish to use Bakunin’s language, We could call this the bureaucratic class, or, following Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, the coordinator class.

The state is an important locus of power for this class, as Bakunin pointed out.

Libertarian socialism historically has been open to a different conception of class from Marxism. Marx operated with a

about institutions that would enable the cooks to govern. He says little about economic management but points to the German post office as a model for socialism. Thus it seems that the all the cooks and other food service workers are not expected to govern their workplaces... not if the German post office is the model.

Marxist sociologist Sam Farber writes:

”After October...Lenin’s perspective for the growing self-management movement in Russian factories never went beyond his...usual emphasis on accounting and inspection [”worker’s control”]...The underlying cause here was not, as some have claimed that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were cynically manipulating the factory committees and that once the party leaders ‘got power’ they had no more use for them...The key problem was that Lenin and the mainstream of the Bolshevik Party, or for that matter the Mensheviks, paid little if any attention to the need for a transformation and democratization of the daily life of the working class on the shopfloor and community...For Lenin the central problem and concern continued to be the revolutionary transformation of the central state.”<sup>(6)</sup>

What was innovative about the Bolshevik party’s role in the Russian revolution is that through their capture of the state they followed a series of institutional moves and practices that led inexorably to the consolidation of a coordinator or bureaucratic class, and the continued oppression and exploitation of the working population.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy*, 72.

After Lenin's decree was published, a regional organization of factory committees in St. Petersburg did advocate formation of a national congress of the factory committee movement to take over coordination and planning for the whole national economy. Isaac Deutscher explains what then happened:

"The Factory Committees attempted to form their own national organization, which was to secure their virtual economic dictatorship. The Bolsheviks now called upon the trade unions to render a special service to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees. The unions came out firmly against the attempt of the Factory Committees to form a national organization of their own. They prevented the convocation of the planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees and demanded total subordination on the part of the Committees."<sup>(5)</sup>

This question was fought out at the first All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in January 1918. Only the syndicalist/maximalist alliance defended the idea of using the factory committee movement as a basis for worker management of the economy. They were defeated by the Bolshevik majority, who were supported on this point by the Mensheviks.

I have run into members of the ISO who insist that Lenin and Trotsky were advocates of workers' self-management. In fact the evidence says otherwise. The Bolshevik leaders worked consistently against direct worker management from October 1917 on. This whole story is laid out in well-researched detail in Maurice Brinton's book *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*.

Lenin famously wrote in *The State and Revolution* that "every cook can govern" but that book has very little information

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crete history of the Kronstadt soviet.

<sup>(5)</sup> Quoted in Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, 320.

simple bipolar division of capitalist society into the capitalist class and working class, based on his analysis of exploitation in terms of the labor theory of value. Thus the capitalists are the class who pump their private wealth out of the labor of the working class.

But there are more forms of monopolization of economic resources than just ownership of means of production or money power in a context of a society where there are propertyless people to be exploited. The bureaucratic control layer in the system is based on a relative monopolization of decision-making authority and forms of expertise important to management, in both the private and public sectors.

(Nonetheless, not all social anarchists accept the three-class analysis of capitalism into capitalist, coordinator/bureaucratic and working classes. Some hold that the bureaucratic control layer are a part of the capitalist class. But this agrees with the majority social anarchist view that private ownership of wealth isn't the only basis of class domination and exploitation.)

Although defending the interests of dominating classes is an essential feature of the state, this isn't all there is to the state. Because the state acts to hold the existing social arrangement together, it also tends to support the various structures of inequality and oppression in the prevailing society. Here we can think of the ways the American state has supported forms of structural racism such as southern segregation or pursued the marginalization and expropriation of the native American Indian population. Or the race as well as class bias inherent in the current "War on Drugs" or the history of racist immigration policies.

Because the state must be able to govern and maintain social peace, it has also been the means through which popular protest and class struggle have gained concessions. This includes various limitations or restraints on private economic power such as the Pure Food and Drug Act, environmental protection, OSHA, etc. This also includes various systems of ben-

efits...free public education, comprehensive health insurance (in affluent capitalist countries other than the USA), and other components of the "social wage"...affordable housing, public transit subsidies, welfare rights, and so on. The existence of systems of civil liberties and popular election... gains from previous eras of struggle...also place limits on capitalist control.

From a social anarchist point of view, the social wage and social services and civil liberties...as gains of past struggles...are things to be defended, through social movements independent of the state and political parties.

The Marxist bipolar class analysis tends to favor the view that class oppression is done away with if the means of production are made public property. Thus in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels advocated concentration of the means of production, distribution, communications and finance in the hands of the state.

But this view ignores the internal class structure of the state itself. In the Russian revolution the Bolsheviks adopted the rather Orwellian term "workers state" for the hierarchical Soviet state that emerged under Bolshevik Party auspices. The empirical reality was that ordinary workers lacked any effective means to control what that state did. The Bolsheviks described the Soviet state as a "workers state" on the basis of an *apriori* argument: Because the state was controlled by the Bolshevik party and the Bolshevik party represents the true interests of the working class, it is a "workers state."

D'Amato quotes Lenin to the effect that "temporary use must be made of the instruments, means and methods of the state power against the exploiters." Social anarchists disagree with this Leninist advocacy of a "proletarian state" — an "authoritarian state" as D'Amato calls it — during a period of transition to socialism. No such "state power" will have any tendency to "wither away" as Leninists assume.

futes the Leninist claim that libertarian socialists are "against the working class taking political power."<sup>(4)</sup>

A variety of conservative and liberal historians say the October 1917 revolution was merely a "Bolshevik coup d'etat". This is not accurate. Kerensky's "provisional government" was never elected and was very unpopular by October 1917. The transfer of power to the Congress of Soviets was supported by the Left SRs, Left Mensheviks, syndicalists, maximalists, and most anarchists, as well as the Bolsheviks. The majority of the Russian population supported this move. Although the libertarian Left had criticisms of the top down soviets and trade unions, they supported the October revolution because they believed they would be able to continue to organize for their viewpoint within the workplaces, unions and soviets. They didn't anticipate the authoritarian direction of the regime that would begin to gather force in the spring of 1918.

The top down structure of the soviets reflected the fact that both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks tended to understand democracy as election of representatives to make decisions for you...a view they took over from pre-World War 1 social-democracy. The Bolsheviks never advocated for direct, participatory democracy as a means of working class social empowerment. This is closely related to the unwillingness of the Bolsheviks to advocate or support workers' self-management of industry.

Lenin's November 1917 decree for "workers control" did not advocate workers' management. The word "kontrol" in Russian has a weaker meaning than "control" in English. Lenin's "worker control" decree merely legalized practices of worker surveillance and restraint on management...vetos on hiring and firing, forcing management to "open the books" and so on. These were things the workers had already achieved through direct action.

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<sup>(4)</sup> Israel Getzler's book *Kronstadt, 1917-21* provides a detailed and con-

ized in the executive committee, which was there to ensure decisions of the soviet were carried out.

The Kronstadt soviet was grounded in a system of assemblies in all the workplaces and military units and warships in Kronstadt. The assemblies met weekly, and elected their own administrative committees. Workplace assemblies also directly managed their work...the running of the drydock, a sawmill, the island's electric power plant, factories making torpedos and dive equipment and so on. Unlike in St. Petersburg, there was no split between a shop committee movement, rooted in workplace meetings, and the soviet. Although they controlled their own work, the assemblies had to adhere to the rules decided by the soviet, but the assemblies also followed debates in the soviet and controlled their delegates, who were kept on a tight leash...they were elected for only 3-month terms.

In January 1918 the soviet dissolved the old city council in Kronstadt, took over all municipal functions, and also expropriated all buildings and businesses in Kronstadt...a move that was opposed by the Bolsheviks, who voted "no." The Bolsheviks lost this vote because they were a minority in Kronstadt throughout 1917 and into 1918.

The grassroots democracy in Kronstadt was protected by the political dominance of an alliance of two libertarian socialist tendencies... the Union of Social Revolutionaries-Maximalists (called "maximalists") and the Russian anarchosyndicalists. The maximalists and syndicalists generally worked together in an alliance in the Russian revolution...for example the syndicalist/ maximalist alliance was dominant in much of the Russian baker's union.

The libertarian socialists in Kronstadt viewed their form of grassroots government as a model for Russia...a model of governance they called a "Toiler's Republic." Because this was clearly a form of government and worker power, it thus re-

However, it doesn't follow that social anarchism is opposed to political power. Here it is necessary to distinguish the state and government or political governance.

We can think of the polity or governance system of a society as the institution that sets the basic rules and enforces those rules, and holds the society together as the ultimate arbiter of disputes.

From the social anarchist point of view, the state is only one type of polity or governance system. As Kropotkin wrote:

"The State has...been confused with government. As there can be no State without government, it is sometimes said that it is the absence of government, and not the abolition of the State, that should be the aim...However, the State implies quite a different idea to that of government. It...includes the existence of a power placed above society but also a territorial concentration and a concentration of many functions of the life of society in the hands of a few..."<sup>(2)</sup>

Most libertarian socialists agree that some sort of polity or system of self-government is necessary in society. Libertarian socialists believe it is possible for institutions of popular power — a form of polity built up from the direct democracy of assemblies in workplaces and neighborhoods — to replace the hierarchical state in a self-managed socialist society, or such a society in the process of being built, without the hierarchical state apparatus.

Marxists sometimes argue that if the working class creates a new polity to replace the state and uses this polity to engage in coercion, such as against armed attacks on the new social arrangement, this makes the new governance system necessarily a "state." But any polity or governance system enforces its

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<sup>(2)</sup> Quoted in Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom*, 97.

rules, and needs to be able to use coercion, if necessary, against anti-social criminality. Even tribal societies in ancient times could some times use coercion against wayward individuals. The ability of a society to defend itself does not require a hierarchical state apparatus rather than a form of democratic self-governance under direct popular control.

## A Tale of Two Soviets

To defend the view that the October 1917 revolution in Russia ushered in a period of "working class power," groups like the ISO often refer to the worker democracy expressed through the soviets, and the fact that government authority was transferred to the Congress of Soviets in the Russian revolution.

But the main soviets in St. Petersburg (Petrograd) and Moscow were not effectively controlled by workers. The key St. Petersburg soviet was formed in February 1917 by a group of social-democratic intellectuals, including three members of the Duma (Russia's parliament), such as Alexander Kerensky, a lawyer. The soviet was formed top-down when these members of the "intelligentsia" constituted themselves as the soviet's executive committee and sent out a call for election of delegates. Power in the key big city soviets was concentrated in the executive committee where the real decisions were made. Some decisions were submitted to the assembled delegates for ratification, but the executive quickly came to treat the plenaries of delegates as just a rubber stamp. The meetings of the delegates tended to be just an open space for making speeches, not the real decision-making body.

As Pete Rachleff explains in "Soviets and Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution" (written from a libertarian Marxist point of view), the development of a strong independent shop committee movement in the Russian revolution arose partly due to the inability of workers to control either the soviets or the highly centralized Russian trade unions. The

shop committees were elected by mass assemblies of workers in the workplaces, and the various workplace takeovers that happened in the 1917 revolution and into early 1918 were the product of this shop committee movement, not the soviets.<sup>(3)</sup>

The soviets set up in this highly top-down manner were established mainly by the Mensheviks, a social-democratic Marxist party. But when the Bolsheviks gained majorities in these soviets in the fall of 1917, they simply took over the same top-down structure. They didn't try to democratize these soviets. They were concerned about the use of the soviets as a base of party power...a trampoline to jump themselves into control of the state...not as centers of decision-making by the working class. Various steps taken by the Bolsheviks in the early months of their government power further weakened rank and file worker control. For example, a peasant based populist party, the Left Social Revolutionaries (Left SRs), emerged as the main political tendency supported by the peasantry. The Russian peasantry were 80 percent of the population. To prevent the Left SRs from gaining a majority in the Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks "packed" the congress with scores of representatives of union bureaucracies and other officials...thus violating the soviet principle of direct election of delegates by the rank and file.

Not all soviets were set up in the highly top-down fashion of the St. Petersburg soviet. Another key soviet in the Russian revolution was created in early March 1917 in Kronstadt, located on an island about 20 miles west of St. Petersburg. Kronstadt was (and still is) the home base of the Russian navy's Baltic fleet.

The Kronstadt soviet differed from the one in St. Petersburg in that the rank and file delegates were firmly in control. The deliberation in the plenaries of delegates was real as this was where the real decisions were made. Power was not central-

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<sup>(3)</sup> [geocities.com/~johngray/raclef.htm](http://geocities.com/~johngray/raclef.htm)