

# **From Shachtmanite Trotskyism to Anarchism**

**Exploring the Relationship of a Marxist Tendency to Anarchism**

Wayne Price

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In recent years there has been an increase in articles, books, and special journal issues on the relationship between anarchism and Marxism. (For example, Pittman, Dale, & Holt 2015; Prichard & Worth 2016.) One difficulty with such discussions is that both “anarchism” and “Marxism” are rather broad terms, similar to discussing “Christianity” or “democracy.” Anarchism stretches from, say, gradualist individualist anarchism to revolutionary syndicalism. Marxism, in turn, stretches from versions that are almost anarchist to mass-murdering totalitarianism.

One way to get around the problem with Marxism is to focus on the original Marxism of Marx and Engels. I have tended to do this when comparing anarchism with Marxism (as in Price 2013). However, the main impact of Marxism on the world took place after Marx and Engels, so it really is necessary to discuss post-Marx Marxism. As for anarchism, I am writing from the tradition with which I most identify (without denying that there is value in other schools of anarchism). This is revolutionary class-struggle anarchist-socialism (or anarchist-communism, with a lower-case “c”).

In this essay I will contrast such revolutionary anarchism with a particular U.S. strand of Marxist thought. That is the approach of Max Shachtman and his comrades in the Trotskyist movement. They split from Trotsky and the mainstream of Trotskyism at the beginning of War II. Their organization was first called the Workers’ Party and then the Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL). Whether this tendency should still be regarded as a variety of Trotskyism—it had split from Trotsky and some of his key beliefs, but continued to support other parts of his theory and program—is not my concern. (For a bibliography about Shachtmanism, see the Appendix.)

I can imagine some objections about focusing on this tendency. The WP/ISL could not be considered among the ultra-left, autonomous, or libertarian Marxists (such as the council communists) whose politics were close to anarchism. Also, after decades of defeat and demoralization, Shachtman and some of his people abandoned revolutionary socialism. They became close to the bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO, advocated working within the Democratic Party, and supported U.S. Imperialism by defending the Vietnam War. (This is why I am particularly interested in the “left Shachtmanite” tradition, of those who continued to identify as revolutionary socialists, such as Hal Draper.) Also, Draper was a vitriolic opponent of anarchism, from his Marxist perspective.

Some anarchists will argue the irrelevance of historic Trotskyist splits which centered on the nature of the Soviet Union. Dead people once argued over a dead social system—so what? However, what is important is not the historical evaluation of what Stalinist Russia once was, but our present-day opinion of what we mean by the goal of “socialism.” Does socialism mean a statified, centralized, economy or does it mean a self-managed, radically democratic, classless and stateless society? Does a socialist movement need to guard against a middle-class managerial elite trying to ride the masses into power? Should socialism be consciously based on the self-emancipation of the working class? These are big issues indeed, and very current. They were at issue in this debate among Trotskyists.

As the editor of Radical Archives remarked, “Little attention has been paid to the intersection between post-Trotskyist Shachtmanite Marxism and anarchism.” (2010). This is a beginning attempt to remedy that lack of attention.

## The Split in the Trotskyists

Through 1939 to 1940, a faction fight roiled the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the U.S., the largest Trotskyist party in the world at the time. There were a number of issues, particularly what the Shachtmanites regarded as the undemocratic and authoritarian structure of the SWP, dominated by James P. Cannon. However, the major issue was whether to “defend the Soviet Union”—supposedly a “workers’ state”—in its aggressive wars. This was the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, when the two totalitarian regimes made a deal not to go to war and to divide up Poland. Should the Soviet Union’s seizure of a third of Poland be defended against any Polish resistance? Then the USSR invaded Finland and other eastern European nations, seizing even more territory.

Granted that the Trotskyists did not approve of Stalin’s aggressive actions, and advocated that the Russian workers should overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy. Should they nevertheless support the Russian army against the Finnish guerrillas and army forces? Should they accept Stalin’s taking over small nations and crushing their labor movements? It may seem strange to have such a big argument over these concerns, since none of the U.S. Trotskyists were going to join the military forces of either side (which would have shot them). But the Trotskyists had formed in opposition the bureaucratism of the regular Communist Party, which they saw as caused by the degeneration of the Soviet Union. Therefore their attitude toward Stalin’s Russia was a central issue to them.

The issue intensified after the split, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Now it became a military ally of the Western imperialists. Given that the Trotskyists did not support to the British, French, or U.S. governments in the inter-imperialist war, should they “defend the Soviet Union”? (Whether they approached the overall war correctly, see Price 2015b.)

Trotsky had believed (and he was fully backed by James P. Cannon, the leader of the Socialist Workers Party) that the Soviet Union—created by the Russian revolution of 1917—remained a “workers’ state”, although a “degenerated workers’ state.” Therefore, it should be supported in any war with a capitalist state, no matter how unfairly or aggressively the Stalinist bureaucracy acted. That is, the Russian working class was still the ruling class, the state remained a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” This was even though the workers had lost all state power to the Stalinist bureaucracy, were super-exploited and oppressed, and so was everyone else. The Russian state was, Trotsky wrote, “symmetrical” to the state of Nazi Germany.

According to Trotsky and his follower Cannon, what made the Soviet Union still a “workers’ state” was the survival of nationalized property. That the government still owned and managed the economy, tried to plan all production, and controlled all foreign trade—these, and these alone, made the U.S.S.R. still a state of the working class as opposed to a state of the capitalists or anyone else. To Trotsky, statified industry was somehow inherently a “proletarian property form,” something which only the working class could create and which no other class could use to rule. If it turned out that another class, such as the bureaucratic layer, could in fact rule using nationalized property, then, Trotsky declared, the whole Marxist perspective of working class revolution and liberation would have to be rejected!

He was sure that the collectivized bureaucracy could not maintain nationalized property for very long. Soon—very soon—the bureaucrats would either be overthrown by the workers (in which case the nationalized property would be in the hands of the workers) or would themselves break up the collectivized property into share-holding, stocks-and-bonds, traditional capitalism.

Either way, he insisted, collectively-owning bureaucratic rule would definitely be over by the end of World War II, at the very latest.

Trotsky and his immediate followers pointed out that capitalism is capable of existing under various governmental forms. It can exist under relatively democratic constitutions, but also under monarchies, police states, limited republics, and under totalitarian fascism. The capitalists themselves had only minimal direct influence on the government in some of these set-ups, but they still had a capitalist economy, which made these all capitalist (bourgeois) states. The same applied to working-class (proletarian) states, it was said. They might be ultra-democratic states-in-the-process-of-withering-away, similar to the Paris Commune or the early soviets. Or the state might be the dictatorship of one revolutionary proletarian party, as under Lenin and Trotsky. Or it might be under the gangster rule of Stalin and his bureaucrats. Yet it remained a “proletarian state.” So it was argued. Therefore it needed to be defended by the international working class against capitalist states.

Over time, Trotsky somewhat altered his arguments, until his assassination in 1940. Matgamna (1998) claims that Trotsky was gradually moving to reject the theory of Russia as a “degenerated workers’ state.” After the war, Trotsky’s widow, Natalia Sedova, did come to reject that theory in favor of “state capitalism”—and quit the “Fourth International.” But I am not going to go into the nuances of Trotsky’s shifting arguments or speculate what opinions he might have developed had he lived longer. We only know that he held onto his belief that the Soviet Union was a “workers’ state” until the end of his life, even while a minority of his followers and co-thinkers came to reject it.

Not only did Trotsky and the Trotskyists expect the collapse of the Soviet Union’s bureaucratic class, but they insisted that the Stalinist system could not expand in any big way. The Stalinized Communist Parties were “reformist” and “counter-revolutionary.” Given a chance to take power, they would turn away and keep the old bourgeoisie in power, just as would the reformist social democrats. This perspective turned out to be completely false.

After the Second World War, Stalinist Russia seized half of Europe, turning its satellites into copies of its nationalized economy. These were “revolutions from above,” and not at all what Trotsky had expected. Further, in several nations there were actual revolutions, using peasant-based armies led by Stalinist elites, which also created copies of the Stalinist economy—in China, Yugoslavia, and later in Cuba, among others. How could all these countries be “workers’ states” without either workers’ revolutions or working class rule? (Eventually almost all these bureaucracies did end collective property and return to traditional capitalism, due to economic failure and mass pressure, in 1989–1991. This was decades later and still does not support Trotsky’s theories.)

But if these post-war societies (which had not had workers’ revolutions) were not “workers’ states,” then what was the Soviet Union, which was just like them? After thrashing about, the “orthodox” Trotskyists decided that these new Stalinist states were all “deformed workers’ states.” With Trotsky dead, the Trotskyists became the leftwing of Stalinism. The “orthodox” Trotskyists announced that the Stalinist states should be supported against the West—but some day they should be overthrown by their workers (except, they said, for Cuba, which was already a “healthy workers’ state”).

## The Shachtmanite Argument and Anarchism

Over time, the group around Max Shachtman developed a theoretical response to the view of Trotsky and the majority of the Trotskyist movement. It was true, they said, that the state “owned” the means of production in the U.S.S.R. But who “owned” the state? That is, leaving aside paper “ownership,” who really controlled and used the means of production for their own purposes and interests? (This is what “ownership” really means.) Clearly, not the working class, nor the peasants. Neither did any leftover bourgeoisie. Only the bureaucracy, collectively. In a supposedly planned economy, it was the bureaucrats who did the planning. It was they who squeezed a surplus out of the working class and peasantry, and divided it among themselves through their official positions. (They could not directly pass on their positions to their children, but their heirs stayed in the bureaucracy through education and family contacts.) They had “private property,” in the sense that the bureaucrats held the national property separately (“privately”) from the working class. Arguments that the collective bureaucracy could not become a new ruling class were dogmatic and unscientific. Clearly it could and it had, under these exceptional circumstances (a workers’ revolution which had been defeated from within, the international defeat of the working class combined with the weakness of the bourgeoisie, etc.).

The working class was unlike the bourgeoisie in an important way. It did not own property in the means of production. It worked collectively and cooperatively in industry. If the bourgeoisie lost its immediate state power to a dictatorship, it still had its property, which produced its wealth through the exploitation of the workers and exchange on the market. But if the workers lost all political power in a collectivized economy, then they had nothing. They remained on the bottom of the economy, working for unaccountable bosses, with surplus labor being pumped out of them. To call them a “ruling class” in a “workers’ state” was a bitter jest. It was the error of “substitutionism,” the idea that some other force could stand in for the working class on the way to socialism. The working class could only rule in a democratic way, or not at all. This is what Marx and Engels meant by “the emancipation of the working class can only be conquered by the working class itself.”

The Workers Party/Independent Socialist League adopted a perspective of opposing both the imperialist-capitalist West and Stalinism. This perspective it called the “Third Camp,” opposing both the capitalists and the bureaucratic ruling class, looking instead to the international working class, in alliance with the oppressed of the world.

Anarchists could agree with this overall perspective. But they did not accept the Shachtmanites’ continuing identification of the one-party police state of Lenin and Trotsky as a “workers’ state.” To anarchists, even though this regime had not yet become Stalin’s mass-murdering totalitarianism, it was already the substitution of a minority party for the actual working class. It laid the basis for Stalinism, even if Trotsky was to eventually turn against the bureaucratic tyranny. To anarchists, the very idea of a “workers’ state” was a contradiction in terms. A state was a bureaucratic-military socially-alienated machine over the rest of society. It could not be the rule of the working class. The workers could only lead the way to creating a classless society through a non-state federation of workplace assemblies and neighborhood councils—the self-organization of the workers and oppressed.

The Shachtmanites’ concept of socialist democracy seemed to be a centralized and nationalized economy, directed from above by an elected government (instead of by capitalists or bureaucrats). Typical of Marxists, they did not see the importance of local, face-to-face, direct democracy, in the

factory, in the office, in the neighborhood, in the village, in the regiment, etc.==so that democracy was a way of life. These would be embedded in federations and networks, but such federations would always be rooted in immediate grassroots participatory democracy.

While accepting the analysis of a collective bureaucratic ruling class, many anarchists rejected the notion that the Soviet Union was a new type of class society, “bureaucratic collectivism,” neither socialist nor capitalist. They noted that the workers still sold their ability to work (the commodity labor power) to a boss class, still worked for wages, still were pressured to work as hard as possible while being paid as little as possible, still produced commodities which were sold on a market, and otherwise were exploited essentially as they were under traditional capitalism. Meanwhile, the bureaucrats competed on both an internal market and the world market. They were driven to grow and accumulate, just as under traditional capitalism. Therefore these anarchists accepted an analysis of the Soviet Union (mainly worked out by dissident Marxists) as “state capitalist.” (See Hobson & Tabor 1988.)

Haber Kern & Lipow (2008) and Draper claimed that capitalism itself tends to evolve into bureaucratic collectivism. “The tendency toward the collectivization of capitalism...means the bureaucratic collectivization of capitalism.” (Draper 1992; 27) Draper emphasizes the growing managerial layer within traditional capitalist corporations. This observation is accurate and important, but it does not demonstrate that capitalism grows into a new social system. On the contrary, it is what Marx had long predicted as a development of capitalism, due to its tendencies toward concentration and centralization, monopolization and financialization. It is a basis for modern reformism as well as for Stalinism, but it is consistent with a state capitalist analysis.

In itself, there did not seem to be any necessary difference in political implications between the state capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist theories. However, the bureaucratic collectivist theory was remarkably slippery and shapeless. The Shachtmanites never did develop an analysis of its dynamics, its method of exploitation, or its projected pattern of development. At first Shachtman regarded bureaucratic collectivism as more progressive than capitalism, even to be supported against capitalism. Later it was regarded as worse than capitalism, precisely because of its supposed lack of dynamics. Once a society fell under the rule of Stalinism, it was argued, then it would be impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to ever open it up again. Therefore capitalism, which was consistent with limited democracy, was better, since it permitted the existence of labor unions and a socialist movement. The ISL’s theorists saw the Soviet Union’s system as expansive and growing (which was true but temporary), while Western capitalism was (falsely) seen as weakening relative to “Communism”.

This logic led to Shachtman’s eventual support of Western imperialism as better than Russian totalitarianism. Even now, Matgamna regards capitalism as more “progressive” than Stalinist “bureaucratic collectivism.” “In every respect advanced capitalism is more progressive than the USSR.” (Matgamna 1998; 101) From a state capitalist analysis, these are all varieties of capitalism, local aspects of world capitalism, and none is more progressive than another. They are all facing the international crisis of capitalism and they are all threatening the destruction of humanity.

## **What Did the Shachtmanites Have in Common with Anarchism?**

Trotskyists and near-Trotskyists have become anarchists and semi-anarchists (libertarian socialists). (See Price 2010.) Daniel Guerin of France is a well-known example. Castoriadis, the Greek-

French theorist, led the Socialisme au Barbarie group from dissident Trotskyism to “libertarian socialism.” He influenced British co-thinkers, in the Solidarity group, led by Maurice Brinton. There are other examples.

To the best of my knowledge, only a couple of people are recorded as having gone from early Shachtmanism to anarchism. Dwight Macdonald left the Workers’ Party not long after going through its split from the Cannonites. During World War II, he established an anti-imperialist journal, *Politics*, and became an anarchist-pacifist. (Wald 1987; Whitfield 1984) Leslie Fielder was an organizer for the Socialist Workers Party, and briefly a member of the Workers’ Party when it was formed. Then he drifted away for personal reasons. “Yet...in the 1960s, he embraced anarchism ...” (Wald 1987; 279)

The Johnson-Forrest tendency (C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee [later Boggs]) developed inside the Workers’ Party. There, they worked out their own libertarian Marxism, whose program was quite close to anarchism. They developed an important theory of the Soviet Union as state capitalist, as well as an insightful program for Black liberation. (McLemee & Le Blanc 1994)

Stan Weir was a member of the WP/ISL and a long-time labor activist, who became active in the early I.S. Also influenced by the Johnson-Forrest tendency, he eventually came to reject the “Leninist vanguard party” and top-down unionism, adopting libertarian socialist opinions. (Weir 2004)

(The influential anarchist Murray Bookchin was a Trotskyist as a young man and was present during the faction fight and split in the Trotskyists. But he stayed with the Cannonite majority. After the war, he joined a group around Joseph Weber, which worked briefly with the Workers’ Party, before eventually developing his eco-anarchist views. Whether or how Bookchin was influenced by the Shachtmanites is not known.) (Biehl 2015)

In the post-war period, the WP/ISL sought to limit its isolation by making alliances with other “third camp” political tendencies. They had joint conferences with radical pacifists (who usually included anarchists) and others. For example, according to Radical Archives (2010), the anarchist Libertarian League of New York City reported in 1956 a joint “May Day Meeting.” It featured speakers from the Industrial Workers of the World and the anarchist Libertarian League, and also the radical pacifist War Resisters League—as well as from the Independent Socialist League and its youth organization. These were all radical groups that opposed both sides in the Cold War. The anarchists’ newsletter wrote that they regarded the ISL’s newspaper as “...one of the best radical publications in the country. Our friends in the Independent Socialist League have come far in their ethical and social thinking since breaking officially with Trotskyism in 1939...In some respects these comrades are evolving in a generally libertarian direction.” (They were using the term “libertarian” as a synonym for socialist-anarchism, not as the recent label for free-market capitalism.) However, they remarked that the ISL had not fully broken from its Leninist tradition.

Under the pressures of anti-communist hysteria, the Cold War, post-war prosperity, and the conservatizing of the U.S. unions, the ISL moved to the right. Eventually it merged with the Socialist Party, Shachtman swinging to its right wing. He developed ties to union bureaucrats and maneuvered in the Democratic Party, while supporting U.S. imperialism in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Vietnam war. Michael Harrington was just to his left, also working in the Democratic Party but wanting to participate in the anti-war movement. Harrington founded what became the Democratic Socialists of America. (These developments are used by “orthodox” Trotskyists to claim that they prove that they had been right all along. However, these



descendants of the Cannonites had themselves capitulated to the Soviet Union's imperialism and Castroite state capitalism.)

A minority of former Shachtmanites and youth influenced by them continued to regard themselves as revolutionary socialists. This included Hal and Anne Draper, and Julius and Phyllis Jacobson. Hal Draper was significant in founding the Independent Socialist Clubs, which evolved into the International Socialists. The Jacobsons founded the journal *New Politics*. Draper and his co-thinkers totally rejected any support for or participation in the Democratic Party. However, they continued to advocate electoral action, advocating a U.S. labor party based on the unions. Since this was not on the agenda, they pushed for a broad-based, essentially middle-class, left-liberal, party, which would be open to radicals. This was a central aspect of their program, along with working inside unions, supporting the anti-war movement, and supporting the Black liberation struggle. For the 1968 election, they made a major effort to found the national "Peace and Freedom Party," which failed dismally. The U.S. did not need another capitalist party. (The ideological descendants of the Shachtmanites today still advocate a similar approach—supporting Nader, the Green Party, etc..)

## **From Shachtmanism to Anarchism in the '60s**

Anarchists and radicals who would become anarchists were turned off by the International Socialists' liberal electoralism. But a number of radicals were impressed by Hal Draper's pamphlet, "Two Souls of Socialism" (in Draper 1992), which distinguished between elitist "socialism-from-above" and popular-democratic "socialism-from-below." This attracted libertarian-minded revolutionaries, in the middle of a left, which at the time was overwhelmingly dominated by supporters of Mao, Castro, Ho Chi Minh, or who were "orthodox" Trotskyists. (Price 2002)

There were anarchists active in the left, at the time (as I mentioned, quite a number among the radical pacifists). However they were marginalized and outnumbered by those radicals who were influenced by radical Stalinism or Trotskyism. The most prominent anarchist of the '60s was probably Paul Goodman. While he was correct in criticizing the Maoists and Castroites for their authoritarianism, he was wrong in his pacifism, his gradualist incrementalism, and his opposition to revolution. (Price 2006) Murray Bookchin organized an anarchist grouping, which correctly denounced the Marxist-Leninists but which also denounced any working class perspective. (Price 2015a) Therefore many libertarian-democratic proletarian-minded radicals were attracted, not to anarchism, but to the wing of Trotskyism that advocated "socialism-from-below."

For example, I was greatly impressed by Draper's perspective of "socialism-from-below." Somewhat unusually, I had been an anarchist-pacifist, influenced by Paul Goodman and Dwight Macdonald. Having been persuaded by an orthodox Trotskyist that some sort of revolutionary politics was necessary, I still could not accept his authoritarian version of Trotskyism. But I was inspired by Draper's pamphlet, and joined the Independent Socialist Club in New York City. Even now, as a revolutionary anarchist, I believe in socialism-from-below.

There were radicals inside and around Students for a Democratic Society who rejected both capitalist liberalism/social democracy and radical Stalinism. They had questions about the history of the Shachtmanite trend, including its recent electoral Peace and Freedom Party adventure. But faced with the Maoist and other Stalinist tendencies, they were willing to join the Independent Socialist Clubs of America. This reorganized itself to form the International Socialists (I.S.) in

1969. Many of these revolutionaries also were attracted by the advocacy of socialism-from-below and revolutionary workers' democracy. After a period within the I.S., most (not all) of them (now including me) felt that the I.S. was not really revolutionary in theory or action. They split to form the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) in 1973.

Some of the RSLers eventually evolved into anarchism. (I too returned to anarchism, not of the anarchist-pacifist school but of revolutionary anarchist-socialism.)

## **Why Did the RSL Evolve Toward Anarchism?**

Why did many of the RSLers eventually turn toward anarchism? (I am giving my own conclusions, but I have also re-read Hobson & Tabor 1988, and Taber 1988. The authors, prominent RSLers, wrote these texts during their evolution from Trotskyism to anarchism. At the time, they found useful aspects in Marxism—such as its political economy—and did not yet fully identify with anarchism, writing instead of their “revolutionary libertarian socialism.”) When we had joined the I.S. and then the RSL, we believed that Trotskyism (as we interpreted it at least) represented the libertarian, democratic, humanistic, and proletarian aspects of Marxism: international revolution against the capitalist and bureaucratic states, replacing them with associations of multi-party workers' and popular councils, workers' self-management in industry, self-determination for all the oppressed, through revolution-from-below to create a classless, stateless, and non-oppressing world. We were further motivated by the radical wings of the women's liberation movement and the Gay liberation (LGBT) movement—not only theoretically but especially through the extremely libertarian spirit which they expressed.

Virtually all of the rest of the far Left—those calling themselves Trotskyists, Leninists, or Marxists—had a totally different interpretation. They saw these theories and program as really statist, centralist, dictatorial, and authoritarian—and accepted this vision. They were Maoists, Castroites, and orthodox Trotskyists. The latter had abandoned, in practice, Trotsky's program of overthrowing the Stalinist bureaucracies, especially for Cuba and Vietnam. (As mentioned, even the wing of Trotskyism which rejected Trotsky's theory of Russia as a “degenerated workers' state,” believed that it had been a “workers' state” under the one-party police state of Lenin and Trotsky—accepting “substitutionism” in principle. And they mostly held a centralized view of a democratic “workers' state.”)

Could everyone be out of step except us? Was everyone else wrong about Marxism except us (and a few libertarian Marxists)? Historically, we noted, the first wave of Marxism ended in pro-imperialist/statist social democracy, and the second wave, initiated by Lenin and others, ended in Stalinist totalitarianism. After Stalinism, there arose the Trotskyist movement, whose limitations I have raised. No doubt “objective factors” played a part, but surely there must have been some aspects of Marxism that contributed to these repeated bad developments?

We had followed the method of “giving Marx (Lenin, Trotsky) the benefit of the doubt.” Whenever we came to an authoritarian or even ambiguous writing or historical episode of any of them, we did all we could to interpret it in a libertarian-democratic way. Suppose we stopped giving Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky the “benefit of the doubt,” stopped looking for excuses, and looked for authoritarian aspects of their theories and activities? In fact, it became quite possible to find all sorts of authoritarian aspects of their work. Lenin and Trotsky had not been the same as Stalin, but they created the framework for Stalinism. Even as Trotsky finally rebelled against Stalinism,

he never understood what he and Lenin had done wrong and never stopped regarding Stalin's rule as still a "workers' state." Even Marx, who would have been horrified by totalitarian state-capitalism, had authoritarian aspects of his theory, which contributed to it. This included his centralism, his statism, his electoralism, his maneuvering in the workers' movement, and his determinism and objectivism, which were often interpreted as a belief that "socialism is inevitable" and that Marxists, in effect, know the Absolute Truth.

In their re-evaluation of Trotskyism, Hobson & Tabor (1988) concluded with a thoughtful re-evaluation of Draper's left-Shachtmanite "Two Souls of Socialism": socialism-from-above vs. socialism-from-below. "While such a division of socialism into mass-democratic and elitist trends is useful, Draper's classification of individuals and the schools of thought associated with them is simplistic." (382) Putting Lenin and Trotsky in the "from-below" category was misleading (and even Marx's placement was at best ambiguous), as was Draper's putting the anarchists in the "from-above" category.

This view led many of us to look toward this historical alternative to Marxism—anarchism. In the 80s and later, there was an expansion of the anarchist movement, or at least milieu. To a great extent, Marxism had been discredited with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the changes in China. The radical impulse among youth had been re-directed in part to anarchism (variously interpreted). We former Trotskyists found ourselves more comfortable among the anarchists than among other Trotskyists. In 1989 the RSL dissolved, many dropping out of radical politics altogether, but some of us joined the Love and Rage Anarchist Federation, and then continued on in the anarchist movement in one way or another.

## **A Personal Evaluation**

Ron Tabor was the national leader of the Revolutionary Socialist League. Now he is in the editorial collective that produces *The Utopian: A Journal of Anarchism and Libertarian Socialism*. He has written a book critical of Marxism from an anarchist perspective (Tabor 2013). Asked about his experiences, which led from left Shachtmanism to anarchism, Ron Tabor wrote (personal communication March 2016):

"As far as my own political development was concerned, left Shachtmanism (Draperism, the ISC/IS) was extremely important and played a positive role, serving as a bridge to the RSL/Trotskyism and then to anarchism.

"I would describe the I.S.'s positive contributions to my evolution to be a series of interrelated points:

"1. The 'Third Camp.' One didn't have to choose a side during the Cold War; one could, and should, oppose both sides (US imperialism, Russian imperialism/Stalinism).

"2. 'Socialism from below.' The kind of socialism we ought to be for required, as two of its essential characteristics: (1) that it be democratically controlled by the working class and other oppressed classes; this meant 'workers' control/democracy' (workers' councils, factory committees), as opposed to a one-party dictatorship; (2) that it could only be created by a working class revolution, not one party seizing control through military conquest (Eastern Europe), a party seizing power through

the manipulation of a nationalistic/anti-imperialist peasant movement (China), or a guerrilla war led by déclassé' intellectuals (Cuba).

“3. A series of tactics that addressed these issues: the united front, critical support, military/tactical support. [In this area, the Shachtmanite tradition continued Trotskyist ideas of principled flexibility, unlike most of the more sectarian ‘ultra-left’ libertarian Marxists—WP]

“4. The ambiguity (the two-fold meaning) of the notion of socialism, e.g., the Two Souls of Socialism (although I would now divide the forces/individuals — from below vs. from above — much differently than Draper did).”

Tabor also gives his criticisms of the Draper/left Shachtman tendency, as we experienced it in the I.S.:

“My criticisms of the ISC/IS were:

“1. It was not very radical. Although it claimed to be revolutionary, Marxist, and Leninist, its practice and organizational structure were closer to Social Democracy. Trotsky’s conception of ‘centrism’ is apt. [Political trends in the “center” between revolutionary and reformist socialism; talking ‘revolutionary’ but acting reformist—WP] It seemed to make an issue about its conservatism/opportunism by denouncing the SDS and all New Leftists as ultra-leftists. This was apparent in its ‘one step to the left’ strategic orientation, which justified/justifies a de facto reformism, an orientation to lower lever and ‘progressive’ trade union bureaucrats and opposed/opposes efforts to build explicitly revolutionary socialist forces. The other side of this was/is to try to bureaucratically exclude/silence explicitly revolutionary organizations and viewpoints, while orienting to forces to its right. Its entire approach struck me as dishonest and manipulative in the extreme.

“2. More specifically (as you may remember), I never supported the Peace and Freedom Party, which struck me as reformist and an excuse not to emphasize revolutionary or even anti-imperialist propaganda. I was close to being entirely anti-electoral, although I countenanced support for explicitly socialist electoral campaigns (the SWP/SLP) insofar as they focused on anti-capitalist/socialist propaganda. (Later, I was uncomfortable with the Labor Party slogan and only supported it because Trotsky advocated it.)

“3. It was hesitant to come out fully in support of Stalinist-led national liberation movements (Vietnam) and, instead, looked for reformist forces (the Buddhists in Vietnam) in a kind of ‘anybody but the Stalinists’ standpoint (a hint or legacy of Shachtman’s evolution).

“4. Consistent with all this, it never educated its members and encouraged them to view explicitly revolutionary forces (the Spartacist League, the Workers League) with disdain, as ‘ultra-left sectarians’.

“Looking back, I now see Draper as a (closeted) Social Democrat rather than a centrist. Remember, in his ‘Reorient the IS’ document, he attacked the IS for being too left wing (!!).”

Overall, Tabor concludes,

“As far as my political evolution was concerned, I would describe the ISC/IS influence as positive. Whether that’s true vis a vis the broader left is another question, insofar as it may have served as a vehicle to trap leftward moving young radicals and prevent them from evolving to something more revolutionary, including anarchism.”

## **Conclusion**

Hal Draper also became known for his fierce attacks on anarchism. While arguing that Karl Marx was a radical democrat, he denounced anarchists—especially Proudhon and Bakunin—as nothing but elitists and authoritarians. (Draper 1990) As I have previously written: “Draper really hates anarchism: ‘Of all ideologies, anarchism is the one most fundamentally antidemocratic in ideology...’ More anti-democratic than Nazism or Stalinism? The very extremism of the statement shows that political prejudice is operative here.” (Price 2002; 81) He did have valid insights into the authoritarian sides of anarchism (Proudhon’s pathological misogyny, Bakunin’s attraction to secret conspiracies, Kropotkin’s support of the Allies in World War I, the Spanish anarchists joining the capitalist government in the 30s civil war, etc.). But he showed his bias by downplaying any authoritarian aspects of Marx’s Marxism, while he was blind to the very real libertarian-democratic aspects of anarchism. This antagonized many anarchists. The political trend of left Shachtmanism, as embodied in the I.S., went through a series of splits and mergers. From the beginning of the I.S., it was also influenced by the British International Socialist Tendency, with which it had much in common. In its shuffling of personnel through splitting and unifying, it also attracted some of the more flexible “orthodox” Trotskyists. After various shakeups, the trend resulted in today’s International Socialist Organization (perhaps the largest far-left U.S. grouping) and the organization Solidarity.

Since the dissolution of the RSL, I have run across a number of individuals who had been in or around the International Socialist Organization but had left to become anarchists (not surprising given the relative size of the I.S.O. in the Left). However, to this point, the RSL remains the last known grouping that evolved from left Shachtmanism to revolutionary anarchism.

This essay has briefly reviewed the relationship between one strand of Marxism, namely Shachtmanism, and revolutionary anarchism. While there is a great deal of difference between them, there is also a certain degree of overlap and even cross-influence, as some have gone from the first to the latter. For many, the concepts of socialism-from-below and the focus on the self-emancipation of the workers and all oppressed people have served as bridges to anarchism.

## **Appendix: Bibliography on Shachtmanism**

The most recent collection of “lost texts” from the origins of the Shachtmanite tendency in their split from the Trotskyist mainstream is Matgamna (2015), an excellent selection. It adds to the earlier Matgamna (1998). Both books contain texts from Shachtman’s side of the dispute as well as some from the Trotsky-Cannon side. They both have lengthy and thoughtful introductions by Sean Matgamna of the Alliance for Workers Liberty (UK). These introductions are almost books

in themselves. A similar collection was made by Haberkern & Lipow (2008), with a slightly different slant. Drucker (1999) has written a biography of Shachtman. As the book's title indicates, it covers the history of his political tendency. The personalities and history of the Trotskyist split are also discussed in Wald (1987). There is a collection of Hal Draper's writings in Draper (1992). Draper has published a series of fat books on "Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution," beginning with Draper (1977). The Center for Socialist History ([www.socialisthistory.org](http://www.socialisthistory.org)) has other books by Draper, including collections of his writings. An overview of theories of "bureaucratic collectivism," proposed by Shachtman and others, may be found in van der Linden (2009), along with reviews of other theories of the nature of the Soviet Union, such as the "degenerated workers' state" and "state capitalism,"

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