



This is a repository copy of *V. I. Lenin's struggle against anarchism*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/188827/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Pateman, J. (2022) *V. I. Lenin's struggle against anarchism*. *International Critical Thought*, 12 (4). pp. 575-596. ISSN 2159-8282

<https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2022.2098511>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *International Critical Thought* on 19th July 2022, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/21598282.2022.2098511>.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

V. I. Lenin's Struggle Against Anarchism

Abstract

In the historical struggle between Marxism and anarchism, Lenin played an important role. In "Anarchism and Socialism", written in 1901, Lenin denounced anarchism as a petty bourgeois ideology. Lenin defended this view over the next twenty years, as he fought for Bolshevik hegemony in Russia. This article argues that Lenin's struggle against anarchism was significant for several reasons. First, it clarified the fundamental differences between anarchism and Marxism. Second, Lenin contributed to the victory of Marxism over anarchism, initially, in revolutionary Russia, and after that, within the Soviet era communist movement. Third, Lenin's struggle offers original insights. For one thing, Lenin delineated the revolutionary limitations of anarchism. He identified the circumstances in which anarchism can empower or weaken the working class. Lenin also established the organisation, struggle, and leading role of the vanguard working class party as an independent distinction between Marxism and anarchism, a distinction that needs resurrecting today.

Key Words: Lenin, Anarchism, Marxism, State, Revolution, Socialism

Introduction

Marxism and anarchism have developed hostile relations during their struggles for hegemony within the working-class movement. According to the “standard narrative” (Nimtz 2015, 173), the formal ideological and organisational schism between the two doctrines first emerged during the debates within the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), otherwise known as the First International. Their tensions came to a head at the 1872 Hague Congress. Here, Karl Marx declared that the proletariat had to organise a political party and seize state power to emancipate itself. Mikhail Bakunin, though absent, had denounced Marx’s position as authoritarian. He warned that if a workers’ party took state power, its leaders would become the oppressive ruling class they had fought against. In opposition to Marx, Bakunin called for political abstentionism and the immediate abolition of the state. After much debate, the Congress voted for Marx’s proposals, and Bakunin was expelled for protesting the decision. This result signified the first major rupture in Marxist-anarchist cooperation. Many anarchists left the IWA to form a rival organisation, the Anarchist St Imier International. Anarchism and Marxism thereby emerged from the 1872 Hague Congress as formally distinct trends. Marx became the acknowledged leader of the Marxists, while Bakunin became an acknowledged representative of anarchism. Their ideological differences were clear to all (Woodcock 1975, 136; Thomas 1980, 250; Franks 2012, 209). So goes the standard narrative.

According to Nimtz, the standard narrative overstates the significance of the First International in forming the Marxist-anarchist schism:

Contrary to the standard narrative, the first instance of a “Marxism versus Anarchism” struggle never entailed, as the record reveals, an open airing and debate of the principled differences. At no time [within the IWA] did Marx and/or Engels, on the one side, publicly confront Bakunin, on the other side, on what truly separated them (Nimtz 2015, 173).

Franks agrees. Whilst, in his view, the First International debates helped divide anarchism and Marxism, this division “was far less decisive and stable than usually presented. The totemic importance of the First International was constructed after the event, with the rise of the Communist Party” (Franks 2012, 209). Franks argues that it was Leninism, and not the First International, which did the most to codify and formalise the distinction between Marxism and anarchism. However, Franks does not examine the role, impact, and significance of V. I. Lenin himself in establishing this distinction. This article does that.

In the historical struggle between Marxism and anarchism, Lenin played an important role. In “Anarchism and Socialism” (Lenin [1901] 1977), written in 1901, Lenin denounced anarchism as a petty bourgeois ideology. Lenin defended this view over the next twenty years, as he fought for Bolshevik hegemony in Russia. This article argues that Lenin’s struggle against anarchism was significant for several reasons. First, it clarified the fundamental differences between anarchism and Marxism. Second, Lenin contributed to the victory of Marxism over anarchism, initially, in revolutionary Russia,¹ and after that, within the Soviet era communist movement. Third, Lenin’s struggle provides original insights. For one thing, he delineated the revolutionary limitations of anarchism. He highlighted the circumstances in which anarchism can

empower or weaken the working class. Lenin also established the organisation, struggle, and leading role of the vanguard working class party as an independent distinction between Marxism and anarchism, a distinction that needs resurrecting today.

To develop these arguments, this article begins by analysing Lenin's 1901 work "Anarchism and Socialism", his first major discussion of the subject. It then examines Lenin's struggle against anarchism during the Russian revolutions of 1905, February 1917, and October 1917. The conclusion highlights several key insights from Lenin's struggle.

"Anarchism and Socialism" (1901)

When, in 1898, Lenin helped establish Russia's first Marxist party, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, anarchists were an insignificant political force in Russia. They had failed to "build up a coherent organisation", and "remained a loose collection of obstreperous little groups whose activities had a relatively minor impact" upon events (Avrich 1967, 4). Ideologically, however, Russia had produced several prominent anarchists, including Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and Leo Tolstoy,² whose ideas influenced several socialist trends with substantial peasant support, most notably the Narodniks and Left Socialist-Revolutionaries. Bearing that in mind, Russia's Marxists recognised the necessity of distinguishing scientific socialism, which they associated with Marxism, from anarchism, which they saw as a petty bourgeois trend. G. V. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, was the first to achieve this in his 1894 pamphlet *Anarchism and Socialism* (Plekhanov 1912). Although Lenin respected Plekhanov, he found this pamphlet lacking, so much so that he devoted a section to criticising it in his 1917 work *The State and Revolution* (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 480-481, discussed later). It was probably the inadequacy of Plekhanov's *Anarchism and Socialism* that encouraged Lenin to clarify his own interpretation of the subject in his 1901 work "Anarchism and Socialism". Here, Lenin advanced five theses distilling their differences. Since, however, these theses consist of rudimentary notes and disjointed phrases that went unpublished during Lenin's lifetime, the following exposition re-organises them into five core points, in addition to filling in the missing details.

First, Lenin argued that anarchism and socialism adopted different approaches to exploitation. Anarchism, since its inception, had "produced nothing but general platitudes against *exploitation*", platitudes that had "been current for more than 2,000 years" (Lenin [1901] 1977, 327, emphasis in the original). By failing to advance beyond an age-old moral critique of exploitation, anarchism overlooked its basis in private property. Marxian socialism unearthed this basis.

Second, anarchism and socialism held different conceptions of social change. Although Lenin did not put it in it writing, he suggested that anarchism was fundamentally idealist. It spread the voluntarist view that willpower decided social change, irrespective of the material conditions. Anarchism also denied the progressive character of historical development, especially "the role of large-scale production" under capitalism (Lenin [1901] 1977, 327). By contrast, Marxian socialism established that the transition from capitalism to socialism was a law-governed process featuring several evolutionary phases. It affirmed that large scale production was a progressive force, in the sense that it improved the livelihoods of the masses, organised the working class, developed the workers' class consciousness, and provided the productive basis for socialism.

Third, the anarchist and socialist visions of the future emancipated society featured different economic foundations. Anarchism advocated “petty property and *petty economy* of the land” (Lenin [1901] 1977, 327, emphasis in the original). By these terms, Lenin described an economy of scattered small-scale independent production units. The industrial units would each own their own means of production, whilst the agricultural units would each own a parcel of land. Socialism, by contrast, would nationalise and socialise the commanding heights of industrial and agricultural production. The state, and not the individual production units, would own the key means of production, and guide national economic development with a centralised economic plan.

Fourth, the anarchist and socialist conceptions of the future society featured different political principles. Anarchism was rooted in individualism, and so it opposed authority, hierarchical centralised organisation, and majoritarianism as violations of individual liberty (Lenin [1901] 1977, 327). Socialism, by contrast, was rooted in collectivism, and so it advocated these principles as essential to socialist democracy. Socialism prioritised collective power over individual power.

Fifth, anarchism and socialism adopted different approaches to the class struggle, and the working-class struggle in particular. Anarchism overlooked the centrality and nature of the proletarian “*class struggle* as the creative force for the realisation of socialism” (Lenin [1901] 1977, 328, emphasis in the original). Accordingly, it opposed the workers’ political participation under capitalism, and it rejected the political organisation and education of the proletariat. As such, anarchism lacked an effective strategy for emancipating the masses, and it lapsed into utopianism (Lenin [1901] 1977, 328). Socialism, by contrast, placed the political organisation of the working class at the centre of its revolutionary programme. When appropriate, socialists encouraged the workers to participate in bourgeois politics, vote in elections, struggle for reforms, and above all, form an independent working-class party. Due to its anti-politics, Lenin accused anarchism of opposing the most effective method of class struggle available to the workers- the political struggle. This anarchist policy strengthened the bourgeoisie’s political supremacy, promoted the atomisation of the proletarian movement, and thereby subordinated the proletariat “to *bourgeois* politics in the guise of the negation of politics” (Lenin [1901] 1977, 328, emphasis in the original). This made anarchism an enemy of socialism; an enemy of Marxism.

“Anarchism and Socialism” is a significant work in the corpus of scientific communism. Although it was far shorter than Plekhanov’s more intellectual survey of the subject, it was the first text to *succinctly* summarise the core philosophical, political, strategic, and tactical differences between Marxism and anarchism. It has the additional merit of possessing the trademark lucidity of its author, who wrote it as a Marxist guide to action.

Understandably, anarchist writers have not been kind to “Anarchism and Socialism”. In a footnote, van der Walt (2018, 506), dismisses this text as a “straw-man”. There is an obvious reason why he does not elucidate this assertion: Lenin’s characterisation of anarchism was fundamentally correct. The following analysis will demonstrate this by examining the ideas of Max Stirner, Pierre Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Peter Kropotkin, the principal founders of anarchism.

First, anarchism did fail to identify private property as the root cause of exploitation. The founders tended to view the state as the primary cause. Stirner advanced the purest expression of this position. “The state”, he argued, “does not let me come to my value, and continues in existence only through my valuelessness; it is

forever intent on getting value from me, i.e., exploiting me” (cited in Thomas 1975, 166).

Proudhon was more nuanced. He connected private property to exploitation in his famous slogan “property is theft!”, arguing that in a society in which only some people own private property, the propertyless must sell their labour to the proprietor to live. When the propertyless labour together as a social force, they produce something greater than the sum of their individual forces, and “the collective force remains to be paid” (Proudhon cited in Jamil 2022, 156). The proprietor exploits the labour force by keeping the profits that the collective force creates. That said, Proudhon still viewed the state as the primary culprit. His reasoning was that “the state holds together property claims, which, in turn, distorts exchange and leads to exploitation” (Jamil 2022, 162). Proudhon viewed exploitation as the result of state coercion.

Bakunin adopted a confused perspective. He occasionally rooted exploitation in private property, though he never offered a scientific explanation of the process. At the same time, Bakunin obscured the economic basis of exploitation by confusing it with state oppression, saying that “to exploit and to govern mean the same thing, one completing the other” (Bakunin 1953, 132). Consequently, Bakunin erroneously accused Marxian socialism of creating a “new type of exploitation based not upon material property or capital, but upon intellectual power and bureaucratic capacity” (Hodges 1960, 263). This accusation uprooted exploitation from its economic base and placed it purely within the realm of politics and ideology.

Kropotkin more consistently rooted exploitation in private property. However, he rejected the labour theory of value, which shows that a commodity’s value reflects the amount of labour used to produce it (Bekken 2009, 223). Consequently, Kropotkin failed to develop a scientific understanding of exploitation.

As Lenin rightly argued, classical anarchism was also more interested in morally condemning exploitation than it was in understanding it. Bakunin, for example, thought that capitalism was unjust in so far as it was exploitative, and that for this reason it ought to be overcome. Marx, by contrast, did not only offer moral criticism. He also identified exploitation as a necessary feature of historical economic evolution, one that would be overcome by the objective contradictions of socio-economic development. For Marx, it was not enough to only criticise exploitation, for this would change nothing. It was also essential to discover the objective forces that brought exploitation into being, in addition to those objective forces that would end up destroying it. As such, Laibman is right when he describes anarchism as “a cry against exploitation with little to rely on other than the alienated and superficial forms in which social reality presents itself to the spontaneous observer” (Laibman 2016, 416).

Second, anarchism did endorse an idealist conception of social development. Although the classics likened themselves as materialists, they were not historical materialists. They did not recognise the objective material laws governing society’s development, from primitive society through to slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and communism. To varying degrees, they each identified ideological consciousness as the guiding force of society (Meyer 2018, 362, 365).

Bakunin came the closest to historical materialism, by showing some sympathy for Marx’s theory of base and superstructure (Bakunin 1970, 9). However, Bakunin also displayed a voluntarist preference (Bakunin 1980, 311), and he criticised Marx for underappreciating the subjective factor in history (Bakunin 1973, 256). For instance, Bakunin thought that a social revolution could occur regardless of the objective material conditions, so long as the workers had the required will (Gouldner 1982, 873). It is also well established that “anarchism encouraged individuals to assassinate tyrants and...

destroy symbols of oppression, such as government buildings and stock exchanges” (Meyer 2018, 362, 365). Anarchists thought that those spontaneous acts of terrorist volition could change the course of history (Meyer 2018, 365). Marx rejected these voluntarist theories and strategies. He argued that a successful socialist transition could occur only when the objective conditions were ripe (Gouldner 1982, 873).

In connection with this, classical anarchism did deny the progressive character of historical development. According to Bakunin, capitalist technological innovations benefitted “only the privileged classes and the power of the states...they have never benefitted the masses of the people” (cited in Gouldner 1982, 872). This conviction led Bakunin to the conclusion that the transition from capitalism to freedom required the destruction of “bourgeois civilisation”. He wanted to turn back the clock and return to small scale agrarian peasant communes (Gouldner 1982, 873-874). This undialectical perspective stood in contrast to Marxism, which maintained that socialism would emerge from and inherit the progressive aspects of capitalism, including large-scale production, by placing it under the direction of the new workers’ state (Gouldner 1982, 873).

Ultimately, then, while some anarchists dabbled with historical materialism, they never integrated the methodology into their own analysis, and they did not adopt Marx’s view of the successive modes of production. This proves Lenin’s argument that classical anarchism never developed a scientific analysis of the laws of social development.

Third, anarchism did seek an economy of independent small-scale petty property owners. Except for Stirner, whose fantastical “union of egoists” eschewed property entirely (Leopold 2013), the classics advocated “the downsizing, fragmenting, and parcelling out of capitalist-held property, and not its socialisation” (Meyer 2018, 369).

There were, of course, variations on this theme. Proudhon advocated mutualism, a petty bourgeois system in which individual workers would own their own mean of production and trade with each other freely, by forming voluntary decentralised producers’ federations (Proudhon 1989, 277, 281). Proudhon emphasised the maintenance of small-scale property ownership, to defend against concentrations of wealth and property. He wanted property to be roughly evenly distributed and limited in size, so that its chief owners would be workers, families, and small workers’ associations (Proudhon 1960, 129, 133, 135-36).

By contrast, Bakunin’s collectivist anarchism did not feature private property. Bakunin advocated voluntary federations of larger economic units, derived from Russia’s peasant communes, in which the means of production would be collectively owned and controlled by the producers within them. However, Bakunin stopped short of endorsing nationalisation. In his utopia, like Proudhon’s, the individual economic units could secede from the federation as they pleased (Gouldner 1982, 859, 869). Kropotkin (2015) endorsed essentially the same vision, with the major difference being that his replaced the wage system of Bakunin’s model with a communist system of distribution according to need (Bookchin 2014). Due to their anti-statism, the classical anarchists eschewed the Marxist principles of state control over the means of production and centralised economic planning.

Fourth, the anarchist conception of emancipation did advocate an individualist politics. In the classical anarchist utopias, “individual rights are prioritised over all forms of collective power” (Wigger 2016, 136). In his article “Anarchism as Individualism”, the prominent anarchist Murray Bookchin (2014) confirms that anarchism has always sought a future of voluntary agreements between individuals. Stirner formulated this premise in his 1844 book *The Ego and its Own*. Stirner aspired

for a “union of egoists” in which every individual could pursue their self-interest without hindrance (Thomas 1975). Likewise, Proudhon’s mutualist proposals were “built around entirely bourgeois concepts of individualism” (Bookchin 2014). Although Bakunin and Kropotkin claimed to reject individualism in favour of anarcho-collectivism and anarcho-communism, respectively, their voluntary federalist associations “were themselves essentially individualistic, often overlaid with socialist ideas”, to the extent that the socialist element “stood in utter contradiction to their individualist foundations” (Bookchin 2014; Laibman 2016, 415). Accordingly, the anarchist and Marxist conceptions of human emancipation proceed from fundamentally different political principles. Whereas Marxism is founded upon collectivism, anarchism is founded upon individualism (Stalin 1951, 9-10).

Following on from this distinction, Lenin was right in claiming that anarchism rejected the socialist political principles of majoritarianism, centralised authority, and hierarchical organisation. The repudiation of these principles lied at “the very core of anarchist thought and action” (Meyer 2018, 362). Stirner (1995, 175) rejected majority rule on the basis that it represented the tyranny of the majority over the individual (Lundstrom 2018, 46). So too did Kropotkin (1970, 51-52), Proudhon and Bakunin. In their voluntary federal systems, the individual organisational units had the right to secede if they disagreed with the federal-level decisions (Gouldner 1982, 861, 865, 869). Bakunin and his followers displayed their disdain for majority rule, authority, and disciplined organisation by disregarding these principles within the First International. In violation of the International’s organisational rules, the Bakuninists opposed its majoritarian decisions, and even established a secret anti-democratic organisation to undermine it (Nimtz 2015, 167-68).

As far as the classical anarchists were concerned, individual liberty was sacrosanct in an emancipated society. “When Kropotkin and other anarchists extol ‘free agreements’ they express a voluntarism by which individuals and communities not only confederate together but may withdraw from these confederations at will, making collective social and political life impossible” (Bookchin 2014). As a result, the classical anarchists all opposed the democratic state, even the most radical democratic state, for manifesting majority rule, hierarchy, and authority (Lundstrom 2018).

Lenin’s fifth claim, that anarchists misunderstood and relegated the political class struggle, was correct. “Because the state is viewed as an authoritarian body, they reject any engagement with the state, from participation in parliamentary elections to the revolutionary seizure of the state apparatus. This is often formulated as the rejection of politics per se” (Choat 2016, 98). Classical anarchism tended to favour the formation of secretive conspiratorial cabals, direct action, and acts of individual terrorism, over attempts to politically organise the working class. Stirner, for instance, had little involvement in the working-class movement, and a class analysis is absent in his works. Although Stirner claimed to support the proletariat, his conception of this class had “nothing in common” with the scientific definition adopted by Marxism (Thomas 1975, 166). Stirner included criminals and intellectuals within his proletariat, people who, as Marx argued, “existed in every epoch” (Marx and Engels 1965, 216-217). Stirner showed no interest in mobilising the working class politically.

Proudhon adopted the same attitude, which was rooted in his rejection of class antagonisms and the class struggle. Proudhon was hostile to the workers participating in politics. He opposed voting rights for workers, declaring that “universal suffrage is the counter-revolution” (cited in Blackledge 2010). He was also a reformist who opposed violent revolutions (Hyams 1979, 58). Proudhon’s preferred utopian solution was for the workers to rely on their economic strength, by establishing their own

companies to out-compete the capitalists and put the bourgeoisie out of business, thereby avoiding the need for violence (Carter 1971, 53). As for Kropotkin (1970, 165), he opposed reformist legislation, regardless of how progressive it was, since he thought that state policies benefitted only the “privileged classes”. Kropotkin advocated “a purely economic struggle against capitalism, without interfering in the political parliamentary agitation” (Meyer 2018, 372).

Bakunin represented an advance. Unlike the other classical anarchists, he was active within the First International, a leading political organisation of the working class (Gouldner 1982, 869-72). However, Bakunin undermined the International in several ways. For one thing, he opposed the workers’ participation in bourgeois politics. In his view, such political activity was worthwhile only if it produced a social revolution without delay (Gouldner 1982, 875). As such, Bakunin “was utopian in his inclination to avoid politics and the mobilisation of power in present bourgeois society” (Gouldner 1982, 877). Unlike Marx, Bakunin also saw non-proletarian elements- peasants, criminals, students, petty bourgeois intellectuals- as amongst the best revolutionary combatants in the anti-capitalist struggle (Mendel 1981, 346). Bakunin did form a political organisation, the International Alliance of Social Democracy, but this was a secret conspiratorial non-democratic sect with little connection to the proletariat, founded to contravene the First International (Mendel 1981, 335). It was the opposite of a mass working class party.

In summary, then, there is only a grain of truth in van der Walt’s characterisation of Lenin’s “Anarchism and Socialism” as a “straw man”. Lenin’s generalisations did ignore the nuanced, though superficial ideological differences between the various classical anarchist trends. He was also wrong to assert that anarchism lacked “a doctrine, revolutionary teaching, or theory” (Lenin [1901] 1977, 330). Although the “primitive conceptualisations” of anarchist theory failed to achieve the level of scientific analysis attained by Marxism (Laibman 2016, 417), they still qualified as a doctrine, revolutionary teaching, or theory.

Nonetheless, Lenin’s five core propositions were fundamentally correct. They brilliantly encapsulated the core distinctions between Marxism and anarchism. Unlike Marxism, anarchism did advocate an excessively moralistic, unscientific understanding of exploitation. Unlike Marxism, anarchism did adopt an idealist conception of social development. Unlike Marxism, anarchism did advocate a decentralised petty bourgeois economy. Unlike Marxism, anarchism was founded upon individualism, which led it to negate centralised authority, hierarchical organisation, and majority rule; and unlike Marxism, anarchism did relegate the class struggle, by opposing the workers’ political participation, organisation, and education under capitalism. It is possible, of course, to quote individual anarchists to show that they repudiate these principles, and even prove “that they actually have much in common with Marxism. Indeed; but only insofar as they cease to represent what anarchism essentially is” (Laibman 2016, 415-416): a fundamentally petty bourgeois, anti-proletarian, anti-socialist trend. Lenin was absolutely correct when he described anarchism as a “[c]omplete fiasco” and “a product of *despair*. The psychology of the unsettled intellectual or the vagabond and not of the proletariat” (Lenin [1901] 1977, 328, 327, emphasis in the original).

After writing “Anarchism and Socialism”, Lenin went on to elucidate and apply its core points in his struggle against Russian anarchism.³ In the years preceding February 1917, Lenin’s primary concern was completing the democratic revolution and overthrowing Tsarism. Accordingly, Lenin focused mainly upon anarchist anti-politics, which he saw as the most harmful aspect of the doctrine during this period. Lenin’s reasoning was simple: to complete the democratic revolution, it was essential for a

Marxist party to politically organise, train and lead the working class. By promoting anti-politics, anarchism undermined this objective. Lenin therefore sought to ensure that anarchism did not infect the working class with its political abstentionism.

Anarchism and the 1905 Revolution

The 1905 Revolution was a key event in Lenin's anti-anarchist struggle. During this mass upheaval against Tsarism, which lasted from January 1905 until mid 1907, workers and peasants established political councils called Soviets throughout Russia, with the aim of establishing a democratic republic. Lenin encouraged the Bolsheviks to participate in the Soviets, to try and organise them politically and link their activities with those of the party (Liebman 1980, 89). Doing so would be an essential step in undertaking a successful democratic revolution.

On the 23 November 1905 the Petersburg Soviet voted to bar anarchists from the organisation. The Executive Committee's rationale was twofold. First, anarchism rejected the political struggle, whereas the Soviets arose to develop this struggle. Second, only political parties could join the Soviets, and the anarchists were not a party.

Lenin was jubilant. The next day, he published a newspaper piece titled "Socialism and Anarchism" supporting this decision, in which he highlighted its theoretical and practical significance. Anarchism, he explained, sought to repudiate "the political struggle, disunite the proletarians and convert them in fact into passive participators in one bourgeois policy or another, since it is impossible and unrealisable for the workers really to dissociate themselves from politics" (Lenin [1905] 1978, 73). Barring the anarchists did not undermine the Soviet, a fighting organisation with political aims. In such a body, anarchists would "bring disorganisation and thus weaken the force of the joint assault" (Lenin [1905] 1978, 72). The anarchists were inconsistent for claiming to reject political struggles, whilst simultaneously applying for representation in a political organisation. This proved "how utterly unstable" their philosophy was (Lenin [1905] 1978, 71). Lenin urged the Bolsheviks to "resort to every means of ideological struggle to keep the influence of the anarchists over the Russian workers just as negligible as it has been so far" (Lenin [1905] 1978, 74).

That said, Lenin was not totally hostile. He explained that he did not oppose anarchist political representation in principle. Had the Soviets established themselves as parliaments or organs of proletarian self-government, then it would have been wise to admit the anarchists, especially since they had proletarian supporters (Lenin [1905] 1978, 71; see also Krausz 2015, 124). These statements reveal that Lenin was not completely dismissive of anarchism. He was willing to work alongside anarchists under a workers' government, as long as they accepted such a government.

When, in 1906, state repression gave rise to instances of armed struggle against Tsarism, Lenin embraced this tactic, though he was careful to distinguish between the Marxist and anarchist approaches to it. In his article "Guerrilla Warfare", Lenin argued that it was "incorrect, unscientific and unhistorical" to denounce all armed struggles as anarchistic (Lenin [1906] 1972b, 217-218). The characterisation of this phenomenon depended upon the people partaking in it, as well as the circumstances. If an armed struggle was waged by a secretive society of conspirators, divorced from the masses, and under peaceful conditions, then it was anarchic. But if such a struggle was conducted by a workers' organisation, in response to state repression, and within the context of a countrywide workers' revolt, then it was proletarian, and Marxists were duty-bound to support it. Lenin argued that some of the armed struggles throughout

1906 were proletarian in character, though he separated these from the anarchist armed struggles, which he repudiated (Lenin [1906] 1972b, 217-218).

In the end, the 1905 Revolution failed to democratise Russia. Tsarism remained in power. This was largely due to the disorganised character of the Soviets and workers' revolts, which the Bolsheviks failed to assume leadership of. The anarchists contributed to this disorganisation with their sporadic terrorist attacks on government targets, which only served to intensify the state's repression of the masses.

The failure of the 1905 Revolution deepened Lenin's understanding of anarchism. It confirmed his conviction that anarchist anti-politics undermined the proletarian movement, and that the working class could emancipate itself only under the political leadership of a vanguard working-class party. In the following years, Lenin became more determined to develop such a party.

Anarchism and the 1917 February Revolution

Lenin's anti-anarchist struggle entered a new phase during the Great War, as socialists across the ideological spectrum modified their stances in response to the transformation of the global political landscape. A particularly influential event was the 1917 February Revolution, which witnessed the downfall of the Russian monarchy and the establishment of a provisional government. This institution set itself the task of establishing a capitalist democratic republic by convening a constituent assembly. The provisional government was not the only organisation claiming legitimate political authority over Russia. The workers' and peasants' Soviets also sprung up all over the country with renewed force, thereby establishing a system of dual power. Both the Bolsheviks and anarchists participated in the February Revolution, though neither assumed a leading role.

Several scholars have accused Lenin of promoting anarchism between February and October 1917 (Liebman 1980, 190; Avrich 1967, 127). In his *April Theses*, for instance, Lenin allegedly endorsed an array of "anarchist" principles: "the transformation of the war into a socialist revolution; the replacement of the provisional government with the Soviets; the transfer of land from the nobility to the peasants; the levelling of incomes; the abolition of the bureaucracy, army and police" (Avrich 1967, 127). Although Lenin's call for the Soviets to seize state power caused some hesitation, many anarchists were satisfied enough to consider cooperating with the Bolsheviks. Lenin's demand to demolish the existing order "was precisely what most anarchists wanted to hear" (Avrich 1967, 128). Some even thought that he sought to destroy the state as soon as the workers seized it (D'Agostino 2019, 424; Miller 1983, 90-91; Marshall 1993, 472; Wenzer 1993, 124).

"Lenin's impatience" with capitalism and his "maximalist zeal to push history forward" also angered some Bolsheviks, who accused him of abandoning historical materialism for anarchism (Avrich 1967, 127). The *April Theses* were highlighted as heresy, since they allegedly revealed Lenin's voluntarist intent to skip capitalism and head straight for socialism. His slogan "all power to the Soviets" shocked many Bolsheviks, some of whom supported the Provisional Government (Avrich 1967, 128-129). His denunciation of bourgeois democracy was criticised by Karl Kautsky, the "pope" of Second International Marxism, who promoted the liberal parliamentary state as the political foundation for socialism (Avrich 1967, 127-129).

When workers' committees formed in the factories demanding control over them, Lenin was supportive. Anarcho-syndicalists viewed this as "further evidence" of his "retreat from Marxist dogma" (Avrich 1967, 142-143).

What is more, several commentators describe Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, written between August and September 1917, as an anarchist text (Ulam 1969, 462; Avrich 1967, 129; Liebman 1980, 194; Choat 2016, 98). They claim that it presented a libertarian vision that was stateless, decentralised, and "similar to the local communes of which the anarchists had dreamed" (Shub 1953, 227).

According to Liebman, Lenin revealed his anarchist sympathies not only in what he said and did from February to October, but also in what he did not say and do. During this period, Lenin supposedly refrained from attacking the anarchists publicly. He passively observed the "*rapprochement* between many Bolshevik and anarchist militants" (Liebman 1980, 196-197). He did not oppose the Bolshevik attendance of anarchist meetings.

Were these really the actions and words of an anarchist? Lenin did not think so. In *Imperialism*, published in mid-1917, he presented a Marxist case for the imminent collapse of capitalism, which had reached its highest and final phase. Lenin maintained that the war, a manifestation of imperialism, had created the ideal objective conditions for the revolutionary transition from state monopoly capitalism to socialism (Lenin [1916] 1974a). *The State and Revolution*, which called for the replacement of bourgeois democracy with proletarian democracy, was the political accompaniment of his economic analysis in *Imperialism*. From Lenin's perspective, the fact that some anarchists supported similar revolutionary measures did not make him one of them. It only showed that they were closer to Marxism than his socialist critics were. Lenin thought that it was the opportunists who failed to recognise the imminent death of capitalism, the social chauvinists who supported the imperialist war and bourgeois democracy, who had betrayed Marxism.

In several writings and speeches in the months following the February Revolution, including *The State and Revolution*, Lenin distinguished the Marxist and anarchist views on liberal democracy and the state. He did so by drawing upon Marx and Engels. For one thing, Lenin acknowledged, in agreement with the opportunists, that Marx rejected the anarchist opposition to participation in capitalist parliaments, especially when the conditions were not revolutionary. As Lenin argued, however, Marx always maintained that capitalist democracy was a bourgeois dictatorship; and could not emancipate the workers. The revolutionary situation of 1917 demanded Marx's criticism of parliamentarism more than ever, but it was submerged under a sea of "social-chauvinism and opportunism" (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 427). As Lenin lamented: "the traitors to the proletariat and the 'practical' socialists of our day have left all criticism of parliamentarism to the anarchists, and, on this wonderfully reasonable ground, they denounce all criticism of parliamentarism as 'anarchism'!" (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 427). Considering this, Lenin sympathised with the European workers who were rejecting opportunism for anarcho-syndicalism, despite it being "the twin brother of opportunism" (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 427). At least the anarchists, unlike many socialists, recognised the bourgeois character of capitalist democracy.

Lenin denied that his anti-statism was anarchist. In his view, opportunists could assert this only by vulgarising the differences between Marxism and anarchism. Specifically, opportunism maintained that anarchism denounced the state, whereas Marxism did not (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 412). Lenin highlighted the errors of this crude distinction by referencing Marx and Engels. In doing so, he emphasised that Marxism did not differ with anarchism in wanting to abolish the state. They both endorsed this objective (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 441). Their major disagreement concerned not the end goal of stateless communism, but the means of getting there. Anarchism meant "the *negation of the state* in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism" (Lenin

[1917] 1974b, 119, emphasis in the original). It thought that that the workers could abolish the state immediately after overthrowing the bourgeoisie. The problem was that anarchism had “a very vague idea of *what* the proletariat will put in its place and *how* it will use its revolutionary power” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 489, emphasis in the original). As Lenin argued, “Marxism differs from anarchism in that it recognises the *need* for a state...in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism...” (Lenin [1917] 1974c, 68, emphasis in the original; see also Krausz 2015, 195). Marxism agreed with anarchism that the state disappeared under communism, the future classless society. But the construction of communism was a lengthy process that could last an entire historical epoch. The state was therefore abolished not overnight, but gradually. It withered away. Lenin argued that Marx and Engels stressed this difference in their struggle against anarchism, though the prevailing opportunism overlooked it. In this regard, Lenin was especially disappointed in Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism. Plekhanov’s *Anarchism and Socialism* ignored the issue of the state entirely, whilst erroneously conflating anarchism with banditry (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 480-481). The anarchists, in Lenin’s view, were therefore right in accusing Marxists of deceiving the workers (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 481, 443-444, 480).

Like Marx and Engels, Lenin presented the 1871 Paris Commune as a model for the socialist state. He emphasised that it shared few similarities with the bourgeois democratic state that the opportunists endorsed for socialism. The Commune replaced the standing army and police with a proletarian militia. It abolished the permanent bureaucracy by making state offices electable, recallable, and universally accessible. It replaced rule by a propertied minority with rule by the working majority. The masses participated in the daily administration of public affairs. For these reasons, Lenin reiterated Engels’ observation that “the Commune was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word”, even noting that “this is the most theoretically important statement Engels makes” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 446).

Ionesu (1970) and Rothenberg complain that Lenin’s acknowledgement did not go far enough. He failed to recognise that “the Commune was not a state, even in embryonic form” (Rothenberg 1995, 427). Likewise, Marshall (1993, 301) argues that the Commune was “more in accord with the anarchist and federalist ideas of Proudhon and Bakunin”. These objections are unconvincing. Blackledge (2010) rightly argues that anarchism has had “much more profound problems conceptualising the Commune”. For although the old state structures were smashed, the workers replaced them not with the negation of authority, but with their own rule. Lenin was therefore justified in describing the new power as a quasi-state. “It is difficult to understand how Bakunin, by contrast, could embrace the Commune”, seeing as he opposed every government and every state power (Blackledge 2010). Even Kropotkin, a prominent anarchist, criticised the Commune for retaining the representative form of government, since this made it “merely another example of that which anarchists should oppose: the state” (Blackledge 2010).

In any case, it is important to recognise that Lenin never sought to establish a carbon copy of the short-lived Parisian experiment. Like Marx and Engels, he argued that the Commune was crushed by the incompleteness of its revolutionary measures; by its failure to centralise economic, political, and military power under a revolutionary authority. Lenin insisted that the socialist state could not repeat the same errors. It would make “*more* use of the *revolutionary* power of the *state*, that is, of the proletariat armed and organised as the ruling class” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 444, emphasis in the original; see also Wallerstein and Gao 2014, 108).

To begin with, Lenin refuted Bernstein’s attempt to present Marx as a federalist.

In his view, the father of revisionism confused Marx with Proudhon, thereby establishing “one of the roots of the extreme vulgarisation of the views on the difference between Marxism and anarchism” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 434). Lenin argued that Marx opposed Proudhon and Bakunin on the subject of federalism. Marx was a centralist, who did not associate socialism with federalism.

Lenin also dismissed the notion that socialism could dispense with administration and subordination. “These anarchist dreams, based upon incomprehension of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, are totally alien to Marxism” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 430). In his critique of Proudhonism, which “repudiated all authority, all subordination, all power”, Engels showed that factories were complex technical establishments, based upon systematic social cooperation (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 441). They required a degree of subordination, and they therefore could not function without an authority power structure. Another difference was that Marxism advocated “centralised, large-scale... production”, whereas anarchism advocated “disconnected small production” (Lenin [1917] 1974d, 325).

Lastly, in an oft overlooked passage in *The State and Revolution*, Lenin bestowed a leading political role to the communist party under socialism. Lenin argued that the party would lead the working class during the period of socialist construction (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 409). The significance of this passage cannot be overexaggerated. In his most libertarian work, Lenin asserted that the lengthy construction of socialism would proceed under the direction of a vanguard working class party (Pateman 2020, 538; van der Walt 2011, 204).

Although, with these points, Lenin clearly distinguished socialism from anarchism, it is widely assumed that he did not do the same for communism. Today, many sincere Marxists say things like: “well, we may have different strategies and tactics from the anarchists, but at least we have the same end goal- the abolition of the state, i.e., communism”. Another popular saying is that “we advocate different means, but the same ends!”. According to Gerald Meyer (2018, 366), for example, Marx (and presumably, Lenin) assumed “that communism, the ultimate evolutionary outcome of socialism, would resemble a society operating in accordance with anarchist principles”. Likewise, Choat (2016, 97) argues that anarchism and Marxism “share a mutual aim- a stateless and classless society”. In agreement, Wigger (2016, 130) is astonished that Marxism and anarchism are often juxtaposed, seeing as they both “explicitly envision a stateless future”. The implication here is that Marxist and anarchist definitions of statelessness are identical.

There is insufficient space here to evaluate the notion that Marx and Engels defined communism as anarchism.⁴ However, a careful inspection of *The State and Revolution*- which offers a faithful interpretation of Marx and Engels’ views- challenges this notion. Lenin did not define communism as anarchism.

On the one hand, Lenin did predict that the political differences between socialism and communism would “be tremendous” (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 475), but he refrained from predicting what these differences would be, due to a lack of data. At the same time, Lenin described socialism as what Marx called the “first phase of communist society”, and Lenin said that this phase would retain both “Bourgeois law” and the state (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 472). This reveal suggests that socialism and communism shared several core features. Of course, Lenin did describe the “higher phase of communism” as a stateless society (Lenin [1917] 1974a, 474, emphasis in the original), which is what anarchism also strove for, but he never suggested that statelessness meant the destruction of the party and Soviet (council) organs comprising the political-economic system. On the contrary, statelessness, for Lenin, meant the complete

construction of this system, which was distinct from anarchism. Under the higher phase of communism, the party-Soviet system would embrace the entire society, to the extent that every citizen participated in it in some way. Although the transition from socialism to communism would gradually destroy the state, it would inherit and deepen the party-Soviet system. A dialectical perspective would expect no less.

As such, Lenin expected that the political-economic differences between socialism and anarchism would deepen under communism, or at the very least, remain in place. Unlike anarchism, communism would deepen the scope and scale of authority, subordination, organisation, administration, and the rule of law. Unlike anarchism, communism would maintain political-economic centralisation. Unlike anarchism, communism would increase large scale production and perfect economic planning. And, unlike anarchism, communism would strengthen the leading role of the communist party. Although, to be clear, Lenin did not spell out these points, Alfred Meyer (1963, 60) explains that they are implicit in his and Engels' description of communism as the "administration of things", which "clearly involves authority, planning, control, and co-ordination". In Meyer's (1963, 60) view, these points reveal "glaring" differences between Leninist communism and anarchism. It is equally revealing that Lenin never associated communism with de-centralisation, the erosion of economic planning and large-scale production, or the dismantling of communist party leadership. These anarchist views cannot be found in his writings on communism.

The significance of these points for the distinction between Marxism and anarchism are tremendous. Lenin denied that the Marxist conception of communist society was identical to anarchism. He maintained that the Marxist view of statelessness was fundamentally different from anarchism.

As such, *The State and Revolution*, the text most often presented as the quintessential expression of Lenin's anarchism, is actually a comprehensive repudiation of anarchism. In his "*State and Revolution*, Lenin presented the anarchists with a bouquet which concealed some thorns" (Guerin 1970, 77).

Through the clarity and logic of his arguments, as represented in works such as *The State and Revolution*, Lenin won the support of his Bolshevik sceptics in the early months following the February Revolution. Those who accused Lenin of anarchism once again recognised his Marxist credentials. Those who initially supported the provisional government joined Lenin in calling for a socialist revolution, all power to the Soviets, and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Anarchism and the October Socialist Revolution

Lenin's distinction between the Marxist and anarchist views on the state, socialism, and communism, were not only of theoretical importance. In October 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and began the construction of the world's first socialist state. Meyer argues that "nothing was more damaging to the future prospects of anarchism than the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. It was the Communists, not the anarchists, who actually succeeded in overthrowing capitalism" (Meyer 2018, 380). Lenin's call for the political struggle of a vanguard working-class party triumphed over anarchist warnings that the communists would establish a new tyranny. Anarchism was displaced by Marxism, "which combined the power of organisation with mass political action" (Meyer 2018, 380).

Nevertheless, E. H. Carr (1953, 170; see also Liebman 1980, 261) contends that "from the time of *State and Revolution* onwards, Lenin always showed a certain tenderness for anarchists". This view has some merit. In 1918, Lenin, drew a parallel

between Marxism and anarchism, by observing that at that time, during the dissolution of capitalism, Russian society had anarchist features (Lenin [1918] 1977a, 474). This statement reflected the prevailing situation. Although the capitalist state had been mostly smashed, the new workers' state remained to be built. In many areas the masses were running things themselves, and socialist laws were yet to be made. The Bolsheviks had little control over the lawless country, and Lenin did not seem to mind. On the contrary, he appeared to celebrate the anarchic situation. In his view, mass spontaneity was a necessary phase in the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism. This helps to explain why in the first months after the October Revolution, many observers "confused Bolshevism with anarchism" (Shub 1953, 227). Infatuated with Lenin's anti-state proclamations, "a majority of anarchists in Russia, and a large proportion of anarchists abroad, sympathised with the Bolsheviks during their first half-decade in power" (Shub 1953, 227; see also Wenzer 1993, 121, 124).

Lenin himself noted that anarchism had split domestically and internationally into a pro and anti-Soviet camp (Lenin [1921] 1973a, 514). That said, he did not interpret this development as a sign that the Bolsheviks were anarchists. Lenin instead saw it as proof that anarchists were turning to Marxism, by abandoning their opposition to the state and government (Lenin [1919] 1974, 561-562). At the same time, Lenin credited anarchism for highlighting the opportunism that had gripped many socialists (Lenin [1920] 1974a, 34). Acknowledging that the old division between socialism and anarchism was obsolete, since the global proletarian movement had adopted a new line, one that was neither anarchist nor socialist, but one that could establish the proletarian dictatorship, Lenin urged communists to draw workers from anarchism into the newly formed Third International, which he founded to replace the opportunist Second International. Lenin emphasised that communists would be successful to the extent that they drew "proletarian elements" instead of "intellectual, and petty-bourgeois elements away from anarchism" (Lenin [1920] 1974b, 201). The former were useful in so far as "they themselves [were] still capable of learning" (Lenin [1921] 1973a, 513). Then again, the toleration of "semi-anarchist elements" needed limits (Lenin [1921] 1973a, 514). They could participate in the Comintern only by adopting its Marxist ideological line.

It is significant that Lenin personally corresponded with Kropotkin in the post-revolutionary period, despite denouncing him as one of the "anarchist-*chauvins*" who supported Russia's participation in the war (Lenin (1916) 1974b, 130, emphasis in the original). They met occasionally, and Lenin showed the anarchist leader considerable respect. Kropotkin told Lenin that they had the same aims but different methods; and offered him information on some alleged Bolshevik injustices (Shub 1953). Lenin accepted this offer, though he apparently became tired of Kropotkin's letters and told one of his associates: "I am sick of this old fogey. He doesn't understand a thing about politics and intrudes with his advice, most of which is very stupid" (cited in Marshall 1993, 334). Regardless, Lenin still proposed the Soviet publication of Kropotkin's writings (Krausz 2015, 312).

Lenin also met the Russian anarchist army leader Nestor Makhno during the summer of 1918, and was conciliatory towards him, saying that if only a third of anarchists were like Makhno, the Bolsheviks would be willing, under certain conditions, to work alongside them in the building of socialism (Liebman 1980, 262). Then again, when Makhno refused a Bolshevik order to disband his anarchist army, Lenin offered no mercy. He ordered their arrest and prosecution.

As Liebman rightly argues, Lenin's "unconcealed sympathy towards anarchism, shown in a period when clashes with other Marxist socialist trends were...becoming

sharper”, did not ensure harmonious cooperation between Bolsheviks and anarchists (Liebman 1980, 262). Lenin grew impatient with the anarchists who denounced the Soviet state as a new tyranny, and who called for its destruction. The emergency conditions within the country, and the government measures made necessary to deal with them, revealed “the abysmal stupidity of the contemptible anarchist windbags” who denied the necessity of state power during the transition to communism (Lenin [1918] 1974a, 393).

When, in 1921, Soviet sailors, soldiers and civilians in Kronstadt rebelled against Bolshevik leadership, Lenin highlighted the anarchist influence and its hostility to the proletarian dictatorship. The rebels demanded that the Bolsheviks relinquish their monopoly control over the Soviets and allow other socialist organisations to participate in them. Lenin argued that these demands would empower the reactionaries and undermine socialism (Lenin [1921] 1973b, 184).

Still, Lenin tried to distinguish between the “ideological” anarchists who opposed the state peacefully, and those who opposed it with violence. In September 1921, near the end of the civil war, he ordered the former’s release from prison, on the condition that they emigrate immediately (Liebman 1980, 262).

In the final analysis, however, Lenin concluded that anarchist proposals, whether they were advanced peacefully or violently, were incompatible with the development of socialism. He had defended this idea as early as 1901, and he strengthened it after the October Revolution, when the main objective was to construct and defend the Soviet state. As Lenin expressed it in April 1918, “[i]t is now particularly clear to us how correct is the Marxist thesis that anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are *bourgeois* trends, how irreconcilably opposed they are to socialism, proletarian dictatorship and communism” (Lenin [1918] 1974b, 254, emphasis in the original).

Economic and political considerations justified this statement. A pressing economic task was the nationalisation and centralisation of production. Although anarchist methods in the economy were helpful during the early phase of the revolution, the consolidation of the revolution required the transition to centralised economic planning. “To deprive the all-Russia centre of the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry throughout the country...would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism” (Lenin [1918] 1977b, 96). To build socialism, workers’ control in industry had to entail control by the centralised Soviets, and not the workers of the individual enterprise (Avrich 1967, 160-161). It was also imperative that the communist party overcome anarchy and establish its political control over Russia. In the absence of communist leadership, the revolution would crash and burn. Anarchists refused to swallow these truths, which threatened their petty bourgeois individualism. They opposed authority. They opposed the party. This made them a threat to working class power.

Under Lenin’s leadership, the communist party defeated Russia’s anarchists after the October Revolution. His ideology, Leninism, would go on to govern nearly half the world’s population. Wherever they established themselves, Leninist parties resolutely smashed the anarchists, and Lenin’s name struck both fear and hatred into their hearts. Little wonder then, that anarchists all over the world denounced Lenin as “the Torquemada, Loyola, Machiavelli, and Robespierre of the Russian Revolution” (Avrich 1967, 238).

Conclusion

In his 1920 text “Left-Wing Communism- An Infantile Disorder”, Lenin summarised

his nearly twenty-year long struggle against anarchism. For one thing, he observed that “anarchism was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement. The two monstrosities complemented each other” (Lenin [1920] 1974a, 32). Anarchism arose when socialists violated Marxist principles, as was the case with the social chauvinists of the Second International. When these opportunists betrayed Marxism by supporting the imperialist war and embellishing bourgeois democracy, anarchism acquired “a new lease on life” in Europe (Nimtz 2015, 174). In Russia, however, Lenin explained that “anarchism’s influence was negligible” during the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, and this was largely thanks to “Bolshevism, which has always waged a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism” (Lenin [1920] 1974a, 32). By opposing opportunism, Bolshevism prevented anarchism from growing in reaction to it.

Lenin proceeded to highlight a line of ideological continuity from Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century, to Bolshevism in the twentieth. Both the founders of Marxism and the Bolsheviks had highlighted the theoretical and practical failings of anarchism:

If we now cast a glance to take in a complete historical period, namely, from the Paris Commune to the first Socialist Soviet Republic, we shall find that Marxism’s attitude to anarchism in general stands out most definitely and unmistakably. In the final analysis, Marxism proved to be correct (Lenin [1920] 1974a, 34).

This statement can be extended to the twenty first century. Unlike anarchism, which has failed to achieve human emancipation anywhere (Choat 2016, 99), Marxism has successfully empowered the working class throughout the world, in all the lands governed by Marxism-Leninism. Although Soviet and European socialism are no more, and although mistakes have been made in the process of socialist construction (Meyer 2018, 382), Marxism-Leninism continues to empower the masses in China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Laos (Cheng 2021, 645). The victory of Marxism over anarchism in these countries owes itself not only to the ideas of Marx and Engels, but also to Lenin, the founder of Leninism.

Furthermore, Franks argues that it was Leninism, and not the First International, that did the most to formally distinguish anarchism from Marxism. Prior to the October Revolution, there was no globally authoritative interpretation of Marxism, and so many Marxists found common ground with anarchists, even after the 1872 Hague Congress. This situation changed after October. Leninism established itself as the authoritative form of Marxism globally. Under Lenin’s leadership, the Third International codified the irreconcilable distinctions between Marxism and anarchism. So too did the Comintern’s affiliated communist parties, which adopted Leninism and purged the anarchists from their ranks. With the rise of Marxism-Leninism, anarchists everywhere began redefining themselves in opposition to Marxism on a mass scale, chiefly to distance themselves from the theory and practice of communist party rule (Franks 2012, 208, 221). Both Marxists and anarchists referenced Lenin’s struggle to justify their ideological separation.

This article shall finish up by highlighting some insights from Lenin’s struggle against anarchism. Although Marx and Engels introduced these insights, Lenin enriched them, clarified them, and tested them in the crucible of the Russian revolutions.

One insight is that anarchism is not inherently detrimental to the working class.

Dogmatic Marxists oppose anarchists under all circumstances. However, that is an un-Marxist approach. As Lenin explained, the harm that anarchism can inflict depends upon the time, place, and balance of class forces. It also depends upon the stage of development of the socialist movement.

During the anti-capitalist struggle, anarchism can potentially aid the socialist cause by criticising opportunism, social chauvinism, bourgeois democracy, and imperialism. In doing so, anarchism can mobilise the workers, give them a route into the class struggle, and raise their revolutionary consciousness. Marxists should recognise the progressive tendencies within the anarchist movement in the anti-capitalist struggle, make alliances, and if possible, draw their proletarian elements away from anarchism and towards Marxism. At the same time, it is imperative to ensure that these endeavours do not undermine the fighting capacity of communist organisations.

Lenin's experience shows that anarchism may also help the working class during the immediate aftermath of the socialist revolution, when the main task is to destroy the capitalist state and establish a proletarian dictatorship. As Lenin observed in Russia, an element of anarchism is inevitable, and even helpful, in accelerating the turbulent transition from capitalism to socialism. By seizing their local economic and political organs on their own initiative, the workers can begin to feel their own strength as a class, build their confidence as the new ruling class, and gain valuable experience in the art of socialist administration. Anarchism, in short, is a necessary, albeit temporary phase of socialist construction.

As Lenin discovered, however, after the socialist state has consolidated itself, anarchism can turn from a potentially beneficial trend into a reactionary one. By demanding the immediate abolition of the state, anarchism ignores the necessity of the proletarian dictatorship, which uses state power as an instrument to suppress counterrevolutionaries and construct socialism. This lesson is important today, during a time when there are only a few socialist states remaining in a sea of imperialism. Since these states are surrounded by capitalist foes, it would be suicidal for them to abolish the state overnight. In fact, it would be dangerous for these countries to even weaken or shrink their respective state apparatuses during the present. Until the global balance of power shifts from imperialism to socialism, future socialist revolutions will succeed only by strengthening their states after the revolution, not by dismantling them (Wallerstein and Gao 2014, 108). To the extent that anarchism recognises that, it can be an ally to Marxism. To the extent that anarchism fails to acknowledge this, it is a hindrance to successful socialist construction.

Finally, by emphasising the organisation, struggle, and leading role of the vanguard working class party, Lenin established an original distinction between Marxism and anarchism. "The privileged role of the party, before the rise of Leninist orthodoxy, within Marxism, was a major constraint on anarchist and Marxist cooperation" (Franks 2012, 217). It was Lenin, however, who bestowed the vanguard party an independent place in Marxism; it was Lenin who clarified the principles of communist party organisation; it was Lenin who honed the party's political strategies and tactics; and it was Lenin who legitimated the necessity of the party's leading role after establishing the world's first socialist state. In opposition to anarchism, which disdained political parties, Lenin demonstrated that Marxism lived and breathed through its workers' party.

These insights remain significant today. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, its allied states, and the mass Marxist-Leninist parties inspired by them, socialists in the capitalist countries have become increasingly sceptical of Marxism (Meyer 2018, 361-62), and downright hostile to Leninism (Meyer 2003; Choat 2016, 98; Franks 2012).

Anarchism has played a significant role in encouraging anti-Leninism. Taking advantage of the decline of “the Leninist political structure” and the “dominant role of the vanguard party” (Franks 2012, 222), anarchism has done much to reorient socialists and “Marxists” towards “spontaneity, direct action, and other practices associated with anarchism” (Meyer 2018, 362). For example, Western Marxists like John Holloway, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri have, “like anarchists”, advocated “‘networked’ and ‘horizontal’ forms of organisation that reject or seek to limit [the] centralised and ‘vertical’ hierarchies” associated with Leninist parties (Choat 2016, 98). According to Wigger (2016, 131), a “tidy” distinction between Marxism and anarchism has also become “problematic” due to the emergence of self-professed “anarcho-Marxists” (e.g., Price 2013; Roth 2014). This reorientation of Marxism towards anarchism has been disastrous for the socialist movement. Not only has it blurred the essential philosophical, organisational, strategic, tactical, and political differences between Marxism and anarchism (Franks 2012, 222). It has also failed, especially in the West, to mobilise the working class into an effective revolutionary force. This failure can be attributed to the mass abandonment of Leninism for the anarchistic petty bourgeois utopianism of Western Marxism.

Following in the footsteps of Marx and Engels, Lenin showed that anarchism and Marxism are fundamentally different doctrines. Even the slightest confusion between the two can have catastrophic consequences for socialism. The history of the fighting working class also shows that anarchism is incapable of overthrowing capitalism. Only Leninism has succeeded in this task, and it has produced outstanding results for the proletariat. As such, Lenin’s struggle against anarchism was a significant development in the history of scientific communism, and its lessons remain relevant for Marxism today.

References

- Avrich, P. 1967. *The Russian Anarchists*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bakunin, M. 1953. *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, edited by G. P. Maximoff. Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Bakunin, M. 1970. *God and the State*, edited by P. Avrich. New York: Dover.
- Bakunin, M. 1973. *Mikhail Bakunin: Selected Writings*, edited by A. Lehning. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Bakunin, M. 1980. *Bakunin on Anarchism*, edited by S. Dolgoff. Montreal: Rose Books.
- Bekken, J. 2009. *Radical Economics and Labour*. London: Routledge.
- Blackledge, P. 2010, “Marxism and Anarchism.” *International Socialism* 2 (125). <https://isj.org.uk/marxism-and-anarchism/>
- Boer, R. 2014. “Lenin on Tolstoy: Between Imaginary Resolution and Revolutionary Christian Communism.” *Science & Society* 78 (1): 41-60.
- Boer, R. (2019). “Marx’s Ambivalence: State, Proletarian Dictatorship and Commune.” *International Critical Thought* 9 (1): 109-127.
- Boer, R. (2021). *Friedrich Engels and the Foundations of Socialist Governance*. Singapore: Springer.
- Bookchin, M. 2014. “Anarchism as Individualism.” *New Compass* <http://new-compass.net/articles/anarchism-individualism>
- Carr, E. H. 1953. *The Bolshevik Revolution* Volume 1. London: Macmillan.
- Carter, A. 1971. *The Political Theory of Anarchism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Cheng, E. 2021. "What Is the Scientific Nature and Contemporary Value of Leninism?- A Discussion with Professor David Lane." *International Critical Thought* 11 (4): 638-654.
- Choat, S. 2016. "Marxism and Anarchism in an Age of Neoliberal Crisis." *Capital & Class* 40 (1): 95-109.
- Croce, N. 2015. *Anarchism, Revolution, and Terrorism*. New York: Rosen Publishing.
- Del Roio, M. 2018. "Lenin and the Conditions for Socialist Transformation." *International Critical Thought* 8 (3): 339-356.
- D'Agostino, A. 2019. "Anarchism and Marxism in the Russian Revolution." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, edited by C. Levy and M. Adams, 409-428. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Franks, B. 2012. "Between Anarchism and Marxism: The Beginnings and Ends of the Schism" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 17 (2): 207-227.
- Gouldner, A. 1982. "Marx's Last Battle: Bakunin and the First International." *Theory and Society* 11 (6): 853-884.
- Guerin, D. 1970. *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Hodges, D. 1960. "Bakunin's Controversy with Marx: An Analysis of Tensions Within Modern Socialism." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 19 (3): 259-274.
- Hyams, E. 1979. *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works*, New York: Taplinger Publishing Company.
- Ionesu, G. 1970. "Lenin, the Commune and the State: Thoughts for a Centenary." *Government and Opposition* 5 (2): 131-165.
- Jamil, C. 2022. "Resurrecting Proudhon's Idea of Justice." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 22 (2): 141-167.
- Krausz, T. 2015. *Reconstructing Lenin: An Intellectual Biography*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Kropotkin, P. 1970. *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, edited by R. Baldwin. New York: Dover Press.
- Kropotkin, P. 2015. *The Conquest of Bread*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Laibman, D. 2016. "Marxist-Anarchist Dialogue: A Two Way Learning Curve", *Science & Society* 80 (3): 414-18.
- Lenin, V. I. (1901) 1977. "Anarchism and Socialism." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 5, 327-330. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1905) 1978. "Socialism and Anarchism." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 10, 71-74. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1906) 1972a. "The Boycott." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 11, 141-149. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1906) 1972b. "Guerrilla Warfare." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 11, 213-223. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1916) 1974a. "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism. A Popular Outline." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22, 185-304. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1916) 1974b. "The Tasks of the Opposition in France." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22, 127-130. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1917) 1974a. "The State and Revolution. The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 25, 485-498. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1917) 1974b. "A Partnership of Lies." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 24,

- 118-121. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1917) 1974c. "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution. Draft Platform of the Proletarian Party." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 24, 55-92. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1917) 1974d. "Letters from Afar." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 23, 295-342. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1918) 1974a. "On the Famine. A Letter to the Workers of Petrograd." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 27, 391-398. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1918) 1974b. "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 27, 235-278. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1918) 1977a. "Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies, January 10-18(23-31), 1918." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 26, 453-482. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1918) 1977b. "Comments on the Draft 'Regulations for the Management of the Nationalised Enterprises'." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 42, 96. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1919) 1974. "Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 29, 561-566. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1920) 1974a. "Left-Wing Communism- An Infantile Disorder." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 1, 17-118. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1920) 1974b. "Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 31, 184-201. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1921) 1973a. "A Letter to the German Communists." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 32, 512-524. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Lenin, V. I. (1921) 1973b. "Tenth Congress of the R.C.P(B.), March 6-16, 1921." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 32, 165-271. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Leopold, D. 2019. "Max Stirner." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by E. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/max-stirner/>
- Liebman, M. 1980. *Leninism under Lenin*. London: The Merlin Press.
- Lundstrom, M. 2018. *Anarchist Critique of Radical Democracy; The Impossible Argument*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marshall, P. 1993. *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. London: Harper Collins.
- Marx, K., and Engels, F. 1965. *The German Ideology*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Mendel, A. 1981. *Michael Bakunin. Roots of Apocalypse*. New York: Praeger.
- Meyer, A. 1963. *Leninism*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- Meyer, G. 2003. "Anarchism, Marxism and the Collapse of the Soviet Union." *Science & Society* 67 (2): 218-221.
- Meyer, G. 2018. "Marxism and Anarchism: Their Contradictions." *Science & Society* 82 (3): 360-385.
- Miller, D. 1983. *Anarchism*. London: J. M. Dent and Sons.
- Nimtz, A. 2015. "Marxism Versus Anarchism: The First Encounter." *Science & Society* 79 (2): 153-175.
- Pateman, J. 2020. "V. I. Lenin on Democracy." *International Critical Thought* 10 (4): 535-558.
- Plekhanov, G. V. 1912. *Anarchism and Socialism*, translated by E. M. Aveling. Chicago: Kerr.
- Price, W. 2013. *The Value of Radical Theory. An Anarchist Introduction to Marx's Critique of Political Economy*. Oakland: AK Press.

- Proudhon, P. 1960. *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*. Paris: Marcel Rivière.
- Proudhon, P. 1989. *The General Idea of the Revolution*, translated by J. Robinson. London: Pluto Press.
- Roth, G. 2014. "Anarchism Without Marxism." *Critical Sociology* 40 (2): 301-304.
- Rothenberg, M. 1995. "Lenin on the State." *Science & Society* 59 (3): 418-436.
- Shub, D. 1953. "Kropotkin and Lenin." *The Russian Review* 12 (4): 227-34.
- Stalin, J. V. 1951. *Anarchism or Socialism?* Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Thomas, P. 1975. "Karl Marx and Max Stirner." *Political Theory* 3 (2): 159-179.
- Thomas, P. 1980. *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Stirner, M. 1995. *The Ego and Its Own*, edited by D. Leopold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ulam, A. 1969. *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*. London: Fontana.
- van der Walt, L. 2011. "Debating Black Flame, Revolutionary Anarchism and Historical Marxism." *International Socialism* 130: 193-207.
- van der Walt, L. 2018, "Anarchism and Marxism." In *The Brill Companion to Anarchist Philosophy*, edited by N. Jun, 505-558. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Wallerstein, I., and Gao, J. 2014. "Lenin and Leninism Today: An Interview with Immanuel Wallerstein." *International Critical Thought* 2 (1): 107-112.
- Wenzer, K. 1993. "An Anarchist Image of the Russian Revolution." *Revolutionary Russia* 6 (1): 121-144.
- Wigger, A. 2016. "Anarchism as Emancipatory Theory and Praxis: Implications for Critical Marxist Research." *Capital & Class* 40 (1): 129-145.
- Woodcock, G. 1975. *Anarchism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

¹ Of course, Lenin was not the only Bolshevik to wage this struggle. J. V Stalin led the Bolshevik struggle against anarchism in Georgia. From 1906-1907, Stalin published several articles on the subject under the title *Anarchism or Socialism?* (Stalin 1951).

² Lenin displayed a critical appreciation for Tolstoy (Boer 2014) and Kropotkin (Shub 1953).

³ Lenin distinguished anarchism from the socialist trends that, in his view, displayed subliminal anarchist leanings. Amongst the latter, Lenin included the Narodniks, Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, left-liquidationists, Otzovists, and the Workers' Opposition.

⁴ Boer (2019; 2021) offers a sophisticated analysis of Marx and Engels' views on the state under communism.