

2, 3, Many Parties of a New Type? Against the Ultra-Left Line

Chapter 5: The Social and Ideological Roots of "Left" Opportunism E. The Ideological Roots of "Left" Opportunism: The Anarchist Tradition

"Whoever occupies himself in any detail with modern socialism must also acquaint himself with the "surmounted standpoints" of the movement...And if later on this tendency [petit-bourgeois socialism] takes on a firmer shape and more clearly defined contours, as is necessary and even desirable, it will have to go back to its predecessors for the formulation of its programme." (Engels, "The Housing Question," *MESW II*, p. 298)

That the spontaneous ideological tendencies of the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia provide fertile ground for the growth of anarchism hardly needs mentioning. Subjectivism in all of the senses discussed above—separating ideas from their material connection to the real world, confusing one's own ideas and wishes with reality, and overestimating the importance of one's own subjective activity—make revolutionary intellectuals and students especially susceptible to anarchist doctrine. In the most favorable of circumstances, a communist movement principally supported by this stratum would have to settle accounts with its spontaneous anarchist conscience.

As we have stressed at several points, the rise of the present-day Marxist-Leninist movement did not take place in the most favorable of circumstances for the fight against ultra-leftism. Since the early split-offs from the Communist Party directed their full polemical energies against Right revisionism, the menace of "left" revisionism remained "the danger of which little is known." Though the ideological and political revolts of the 'sixties and early 'seventies had spontaneously opposed revisionism, this "anti-revisionism" for the most part did not base itself on Marxism-Leninism, but rather on ideological trends more natural to the strata from which it sprang. At the same time, the international revolutionary movement offered several ultra-left alternatives to modern revisionism. Lin Piao's **Long Live the Victory of People's War**, which saw no revolutionary role for the working class in the chief imperialist countries; ultra-left currents in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution; the Guevara/Debrayist conceptions of the revolutionary foco and its activities, and the later urban guerrillaism of the Tupamaros and Marighela – all presented a revolutionary critique of modern revisionism which, while couched in Marxist-Leninist terms, fell into semi-anarchism. Without a consistent struggle against anarchist-inspired tendencies, the emerging Marxist-Leninist movement would obviously tend to borrow certain tenets and principles from the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist tradition. The struggle against "leftism" which did occur was anything but consistent. As a result, a petit-bourgeois revolutionist trend, "which smacks of anarchism, or borrows something from the latter," (Lenin, **CW 31**, p. 32) has dominated the Marxist-Leninist forces.

This does not mean that the majority or even a sizeable proportion of the communist camp consists of anarchists or "left" revisionists. Rather, anarchist doctrine conforms to the ideological proclivities of the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia; Marxism-Leninism does not. Therefore radicalized students and intellectuals will experience a "natural" difficulty in distinguishing between the anarchist and the Marxist-Leninist critiques of

revisionism. The confusion of the two gives birth to "left" opportunism. In comparing some major elements of both, we will show why the two-line struggle between Marxism-Leninism and anarchism necessarily forces itself on the communist movement.

1. The role of the conscious element.

For modern revisionism, socialism comes about as the inevitable end-product of the evolution of the productive forces. Through the centralization of economic and political power, and the growth of state monopoly capitalism, socialism inexorably emerges from the very laws of capitalist development. Basing themselves on the power of the nationalized sector of the economy, the working people supposedly can take the road to socialism within the framework of the bourgeois economic and legal order. The continual extension of bourgeois democracy, the multiplication of bourgeois reforms, finally ushers in socialist democracy. Meanwhile, the international forces strengthening "detente" limit the ability of the imperialists to maneuver, until the very possibility of war vanishes (cf. the current CPUSA slogan, "Make detente irreversible"). It follows that the conscious element—the organized, class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat—does not need to **transform** the spontaneous struggles against capitalist policies, but simply extend, strengthen, and multiply them. From the endless accumulation of these reforms, conditions will mature such that the "democratic, progressive forces" can embark on socialism. The Party does not prepare the subjective conditions for a revolutionary offensive, but simply awaits the ripening of the objective factors favoring socialism. "You are now swimming with the tides of history. It is much easier, but you still have to swim and, **at times**, [!!] against strong counter-currents." (Closing words of Gus Hall at CPUSA 21st Convention; emphasis added) The rest of the time, just go with the flow.

Against the evolutionism of the modern revisionist parties, both the anarchist tradition and Marxism-Leninism insist on the irreplaceable creative role of the subjective factor. Instead of socialism obediently following the laws of capitalist development, each maintains in its own way that revolution consists in the **overthrow** of the bourgeois order. The revolution must be **made**; capitalism will not make it for us. Beneath this apparent consensus, however, lie fundamentally different conceptions of the role of the conscious element.

Marxist-Leninists recognize that objective conditions set limits to the possibilities of any given situation. We can and must work daily to acquire the capabilities to take advantage of a revolutionary situation. But the forms of activity, of organization, and the slogans of that work must correspond not only to the economic and political realities of our country, but also to the level of mass consciousness and organization. Revolution depends on both an objectively revolutionary situation and on the ability and willingness of the masses, led by their Communist Party, to make revolution.

If the revisionist parties underestimate the role of the conscious element, and render the objective factors absolute, the anarchists and anarchist-inspired groups overestimate the importance of the conscious element and render the subjective factor absolute. The possibility of proletarian revolution does not hinge on a combination of objective and subjective factors, as it does for the Marxist-Leninists; subjective factors alone can carry the day. In anarchist literature, the subjective factor appears most baldly as the "will" (see especially syndicalist theory influenced by the French philosopher Bergson) or "a passion for destruction." (Bakunin, quoted in **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 14) If these "evil passions" can only be unleashed, proletarian revolution is possible under any circumstances:

"In order to change it **they have only to revolt** against the rich; **as soon as they seriously wish it**, they will be the strongest and the reign of wealth will be at an end." (Stirner, quoted in Plekhanov, **Anarchism and Socialism**, p. 46; emphasis added)

Regardless of the real possibilities of a given situation, regardless of the actual level of mass consciousness and organization, anarchist-inspired groups believe it possible to precipitate great class battles, and even insurrection itself, if only the revolutionaries throw themselves resolutely into the struggle. Correspondingly, a low level of struggle indicates that the revolutionaries have not broken with their "hang-ups," their "petit-bourgeois baggage," their "pragmatism," etc. (see PL, RU/RCP, WVO respectively), and not thrown themselves resolutely into the struggle. Anarchist-influenced theories thus go beyond the "creative" role of the conscious element in claiming that the conscious element can itself create revolution.

2. The political independence of the proletariat

Through its strategic alliances, modern revisionism submerges the political independence of the working class. Instead of upholding the leading revolutionary role of the proletariat, the revisionist parties in the Third World have frequently abdicated this role to the national bourgeoisie (e.g., Indonesia). Within imperialist countries, the revisionist parties have concluded a series of opportunist alliances, sometimes converting defensive, temporary coalitions into strategies for socialism (the CPUSA's "anti-monopoly coalition" with the non-monopoly bourgeoisie), or sometimes offering an alliance to the chief ruling party of Capital itself (the "historic compromise" of the Italian Communist Party with Christian Democracy). These alliances in turn promise a "pluralistic socialism" in which several parties share power.

Both Marxism-Leninism and several strains of anarchist-inspired theories¹ reject the class-collaborationism inherent in the modern revisionist conceptions of strategic alliances. Each recognizes that the proletariat must maintain its political independence in order to safeguard its thoroughly revolutionary interests. At this point, Marxism-Leninism and various anarchist-inspired theories diverge completely.

The anarchist ideal revolves around the completely free individual; as a result its conception of alliances, coalitions and compromises has a moralistic rather than a political character. It opposes any kind of compromise with any possessing class or class fraction. For example, Bakunin and his followers fought against measures in the First International which called for Poland's self-determination. Self-determination for Poland, they argued, meant no more than self-determination for the nobility and the priests. In our day, anarcho-syndicalists and Trotskyites have consistently opposed New Democratic Revolutions in semi-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial countries (China, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, etc.). They reject the bloc of four classes—proletariat, peasantry, urban petit-bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie—upon which the New Democratic Revolution rests (cf. the PLP's **Road to Revolution III**). Where the Marxist-Leninist Party seeks to exploit every contradiction within the enemy camp, and make use of every ally, no matter how temporizing and short-lived, the various anarchist-inspired movements consider all wings of the possessing classes identical in every respect, and equally dangerous at all times and places. In particular, they do not regard the contradiction between bourgeois parliamentary or constitutional democracy and bourgeois fascism as a real contradiction, one which the working class can and must take advantage of. (In the history of the communist movement, the refusal to defend bourgeois democratic rights on these grounds was most disastrously represented by the Bordiga leadership

of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920's; the Workers Viewpoint Organization approaches this position today). "We cannot substitute one boss for another," goes the argument. "We will not defend one boss against another. Down with the bosses So instead of uniting the many to defeat the few, and crushing our enemies one by one, the many anarchist-inspired groups run up the red flag to send the few against the many, taking on all our enemies at once.

3. The revolutionary Party

In their pursuit of electoral majorities, the modern revisionist parties have renounced the vanguard role of the Communist Party. Wherever they can, they have replaced the former vanguard parties with what they call "mass parties." (Though it presently lacks the means, the CPUSA has the same intention.) The "mass party" concept dissolves the distinction between the masses of a given class and its class-conscious vanguard. These parties do include important sections of the masses, but they cannot and will not fight for the masses' real interests. The influx of huge numbers of largely passive card-carrying members coupled with the absence of any democratic life within the Parties has weakened rather than fortified them, opening the working class members to reformist manipulation. The "galloping inflation" of Party membership has overwhelmed the active cell structures, and reduced them to the status of the old Social-Democratic sections, (see chapter III, section H.) This fits the revisionist conception of the Party as a vast electoral machine, or as a tool for organizing displays of mass pressure on bourgeois governments, but it cannot direct a great class battle.

Marxism-Leninism and most anarchist doctrine recognize that the "conscious element" can only include a minority of the popular forces. Lenin put the case for the communists:

"...in the era of capitalism, when the masses of the workers are subjected to constant exploitation and cannot develop their human capacities, the most characteristic feature of working class political parties is that they can involve only a minority of their class. A political party can comprise only a minority of a class, in the same way as the really class-conscious workers in any capitalist society constitute only a minority of all workers. We are therefore obliged to recognize that it is only this class-conscious minority that can direct and lead the broad masses of the workers." (**CW 31**, p. 235)

But there are minorities and then there are minorities. Nobody has ever mistaken the anarchist "minority" for the advanced detachment of the working class.

Since the success or failure of anarchist revolution lies exclusively with the willingness of the revolutionaries to throw themselves completely into the most revolutionary action, the greatest danger to the revolution comes from any dilution of their revolutionary will. Though they speak in the name of the masses against any "dictatorial" leadership, anarchist-inspired groups fear the masses' influence on their organizations. Entrapment in the masses' daily struggle with all its illusions or too close organizational contact with them will weaken the revolutionaries' resolve. Further, anarchist notions of revolutionary action (see below) frequently limit the ability of the masses to participate in anything but the storming of bourgeois headquarters in the first place. Ten determined men poised for action count more for the anarchists than ten thousand working class militants active in the reform struggle. For Bakunin, the "rightly inspired general staffs of the leaders of the mass movement" should number "as few as possible," (Guerin, **Anarchism**, p. 36) and throughout history, similar conceptions have guided the formation of tiny

sects. (Only when anarchists attempted to seize control of the trade union apparatus in countries like France and Spain have they acquired any real influence.)

4. Reforms and revolution

Nowhere does the abyss separating anarchism from Marxism-Leninism loom as large as in the anarchist approach to the dialectic of reform and revolution. Like Marxism-Leninism, anarchism insists on the centrality of revolutionary struggle. Like Marxism-Leninism, anarchism does not worship reforms as either the ultimate goal or as a synonym for socialism. There the resemblance ends.

The modern revisionists believe that the continual extension of democratic reforms will itself revolutionize the masses and permit the transition to socialism. True communists, on the other hand, acknowledge the qualitative leap between reforms and revolution. While not abandoning the reform struggle, they fight for reforms in order to expand the opportunities for revolutionary work. This does not mean that revolution can only proceed by way of revolutionary tactics, however:

"What grounds are there for assuming that the "great, victorious, world" revolution can and must employ only revolutionary methods? There are none at all. The assumption is a pure fallacy; this can be proved by purely theoretical propositions if we stick to Marxism." (Lenin, **CW 33**, p. 111)

Instead the Marxist-Leninist Party utilizes the most varied tactics, determined in accordance with concrete conditions and communist principle.

The fifty-seven varieties of anarchist-inspired tendencies will not admit of any distinction between the "great, victorious, world revolution" and the tactics necessary to bring it about. For anarcho-syndicalists, the trade unions are both the means and end of revolution; for other anarchists, action is its own reward. "Throughout Bakunin's career runs the idea of action—particularly revolutionary action—as a purifying and regenerative force." (Woodcock, p. 175) Where Marxist-Leninists espouse the greatest possible suppleness in tactics, anarchists believe in just utilizing the most important tactics, the truly R-r-revolutionary ones which guarantee that their activity will not be coopted. Revisionists worship petitions, votes and letters to Congress; in reply, the anarchists make fetishes out of bombs, guns, direct action, and the general strike.

The anarchists further confuse hostility to reformists with hostility towards *reforms*. If modern revisionism treats every concession as a stepping stone to revolution and Marxism-Leninism regards them as "by-products" of revolutionary struggle, anarchist-inspired groups see positive threats to revolutionary action in every reform. Even the most mass-oriented of the anarchist trends, the anarcho-syndicalists, are essentially indifferent to improving the combative position of the working class. The anarchist historian Atindranath Bose develops the logic behind this lack of concern.

"The method of syndicalism is direct action...The syndicalist strike is different from the ordinary. It is not a weapon for bargaining...It is a practice in class war, a preparation for revolution...The merit of a general strike is not measured by success. It is to be sought at every opportunity. As Pouget [French anarcho-syndicalist leader] wrote, "The action justifies itself: there is no need to seek results...The strike is recommended for its spiritual rather than for its immediate practical value." " (**A History of Anarchism**, p. 303, 304, 308)

5. The fight against opportunism within the working class movement

Lastly, Marxism-Leninism and anarchistic theories agree that revolution will not come as long as the reformist or revisionist parties have hegemony in the working class movement.² But their conceptions of the struggle against opportunism differ completely.

Marxism-Leninism considers the fight against opportunism inseparable from the fight against imperialism. In order to organize the masses for revolution, we must break the influence of the reformists. Breaking the influence of the reformists, however, means organizing the masses for revolution. Before the working class will desert bourgeois reformism and the opportunist trends, it must experience for itself their vacillation and treachery in revolutionary struggle. For that reason if for no other, reformism and revisionism are not likely to help organize and lead great class battles. The desertion of the masses presently under the dominance of bourgeois reformism or revisionism therefore implies the existence of a competitive pole in the working class movement, a revolutionary counter-force to which the masses can desert. Otherwise, if they do become disgusted with reformism, they will have no alternative save passivity and cynicism.

Anarchist-inspired groups work tirelessly to expose the treacherous machinations of the reformists of every stripe, including the "reformist" Marxist-Leninists. Their entire theory, however, leads them to divorce the exposure of the opportunists from the organization of the masses. Believing the people in a state of perpetual readiness for the assault on state power, they see no need themselves to educate and organize the masses for revolution. The anarchists have only to drive the sand from their eyes. Within the National Confederation of Labor in Spain, the Iberian Anarchist Federation "drew its inspiration from the ideas of Bakunin, and so tried to enlighten rather than to direct." (Guerin, p. 38) Even the action initiated by anarchists aims less to prepare the masses politically and organizationally than to illuminate them as to the true path: the anarcho-communist "propaganda of the deed" or the anarcho-syndicalist general strike undertaken for its "spiritual rather than for its immediate practical value." The upshot is that even where the anarchists stumble into a situation where the masses are looking for revolutionary leadership, the "enlightened" can provide no practical direction. In a non-revolutionary period, anarchist-inspired groups may ride an occasional wave of insurgency, but cannot accumulate the strength to lead the masses on the offensive. At most, they manage to ridicule the reformists and slander real revolutionary organizations.

Footnotes

¹ Anarcho-syndicalism and Trotskyism, for example. Anarcho-communism, on the other hand, while refusing all dealings with bourgeois authority or the bourgeois state, sometimes criticizes anarcho-syndicalism as well as Marxism for their "selfish" advocacy of the proletarian cause. The anarcho-communist Malatesta fought the "extreme syndicalists...[who] were seeking an illusory economic solidarity instead of a real moral solidarity; they placed the interests of a single class above the true anarchist ideal of a revolution which sought 'the complete liberation of all humanity, at present enslaved, from the triple economic, political and moral point of view.'" (Woodcock, **Anarchism**, p. 267). In their hostility to the proletariat and to socialized labor, contemporary feminists like Selma James and Maria Delia Costa, or the **Zero Work** literary group continue this brand of anarcho-communism.

² The one exception is the mainstream or "Pabloite" wing of Trotskyism. Faced with the victories of Communist-led national liberation forces in Viet Nam, Korea, Albania and the other people's democracies, as well as the Chinese revolution, and armed with a "theory" which defined the Communist Parties as reformists, the so-called "Fourth International" decided that a revolutionary party was not necessary to revolution!

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