



## Fantin Reading Group

Socialism From Below: Defining Anarchism

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political action and the state" were established, and the "great schism" between classical Marxism and anarchism took place.<sup>9</sup> Even Marshall, who used an extremely loose definition of anarchism, argued that it was Bakunin who "turned anarchism into a theory of political action, and helped develop the anarchist movement" into a popular force.<sup>10</sup>

The same starting point is also conceded in works that propound the legitimising myth of universal anarchism. While making a claim for the universality of anarchism, Kropotkin also noted that anarchism was the outgrowth of nineteenth century socialist and democratic movements, and was "the no-government system of socialism."<sup>11</sup> It was in the First International that socialism moved from "Governmentalism" to a new conception, "formulating itself little by little in the Congresses of the great Association and later on among its successors," and so "modern anarchism" was born.<sup>12</sup> For Rocker, in "modern anarchism we have the confluence of the two great currents which during and since the French Revolution have found such characteristic expression in the intellectual life of Europe: Socialism and Liberalism."<sup>13</sup> It "was with the rise of Mikhail Bakunin that revolutionary anarchism emerged as a social doctrine and that an anarchist movement grew in Europe and became the vanguard of revolutionary endeavour."<sup>14</sup>

It is therefore reasonable to take the 1860s and the First International as the womb of the anarchist movement; it is also reasonable to take Bakunin, the key figure in the movement at that time, and Kropotkin (after Bakunin's death, "unquestionably the most widely read and respected anarchist theorist" in the world) as suitable representatives of the anarchist tradition, and the basis from which to identify the main

9 Ibid., 155; Joll, *The Anarchists*, 84.

10 P. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana Press, 1994), 3–4, 264.

11 P. Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Communism: It's Basis and Principles' in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin* (1887; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 46.

12 P. Kropotkin, *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution* (1886; repr., Cyrmu, Wales: Practical Parasite Publications, 1990), 5–6; Kropotkin, 'Anarchism' in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, (op cit), 295.

13 R. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004) chapter 1. Available online at [www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker\\_as1.html](http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker_as1.html) [accessed 5 December 2000].

14 G. Woodcock, *Anarchy or Chaos* (London: Freedom Press, 1944), 36.

ideas of anarchism.<sup>15</sup> By doing so, we can also delineate which figures and movements should be included within the broad anarchist tradition.

In particular, it is crucial to note that it was within the *socialist* milieu that the ideas identified with Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the anarchist movement emerged, and given that the First International was a working-class movement, that it was in the working-class movement and the unions that anarchism was born. This is a significant point, one that draws attention to a key consequence of Eltzbacher's position: he removed class struggle and anticapitalism from anarchism. As Marie Fleming observes, "The importance of the socialist impulse within the thought of the European anarchists" was consistently ignored, an approach that is still commonly expressed by the tendency of scholars to juxtapose the terms anarchist and socialist.<sup>16</sup> It is this that allows Woodcock to describe the question of capitalism as merely a "limited region" over which anarchists had no consensus, Miller to suggest that while the anarchists opposed "existing economic systems" they differed on the question of whether to abolish capitalism or institute a resolutely free market, and Marshall to speak of "anarcho-capitalists."<sup>17</sup> Once it is recognised that anarchism was and is part of the socialist movement, it makes no sense to use phrases like "a fusion of anarchist and socialist ideas."<sup>18</sup>

The First International was founded in London in 1864, largely at the hands of disciples of Proudhon and some English unionists. While he was not involved in the initiative to establish the organisation, Marx was invited to sit on its general council. He did not represent any major section of the First International, but was a hard worker and impressive thinker, and was able to take control with the aid of his followers along with political socialists of various types, and the mutualists soon lost any substantial influence in the central section.

15 M. A. Miller, introduction to *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution: P. A. Kropotkin*, ed. M. A. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 6; see also J. M. Allen, 'Ambivalent Social Darwinism in Korea' *International Journal of Korean History* 2 (2002): 1-24; R. Kinna, 'Kropotkin's Theory of Mutual Aid in Historical Context' *International Review of Social History* 40, no. 2 (1995): 259-83.

16 Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism*, 2.

17 Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 13, 15, 19; Miller, *Anarchism*, 5-10; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 641, 653.

18 Compare to M. Molyneux, 'No God, No Boss, No Husband: Anarchist Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Argentina,' *Latin American Perspectives* 13, no. 1 (1986): 123.

individual freedom, democracy, and egalitarianism, its embrace of rationalism, science, and modern technology, its belief that history may be designed and directed by humankind, and its hope that the future can be made better than the past—in short, the idea of progress—all mark anarchism as a child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, like liberalism and Marxism. Premodern libertarian ideas were expressed in the language of religion and a hankering for a lost idyllic past; anarchism, like liberalism and Marxism, embraces rationalism and progress. Nothing better expresses this linkage than the notion of "scientific socialism," a term widely used by Marxists, but actually coined by Proudhon.<sup>167</sup>

Not only is it the case that anarchism did not exist in the premodern world; it is also the case that it could not have, for it is rooted in the social and intellectual revolutions of the modern world. And as modernity spread around the globe from the northern Atlantic region, the preconditions for anarchism spread too. By the time of Bakunin, the Alliance, and the First International, the conditions were ripe for anarchism in parts of Europe, the Americas, and Africa; within thirty years, the modernisation of Asia had opened another continent.

In the following chapters, having developed a clear understanding of anarchism, we will examine its intellectual history, the debates that took place within anarchism, the links between anarchism, syndicalism, and the IWW, and the ways in which the broad anarchist tradition dealt with questions of community organising, the unemployed, race, nationality, imperialism, and gender. Part of this involves delineating different currents within anarchism: having rejected earlier subdivisions like "philosophical anarchism," we propose new ones, like mass anarchism and insurrectionist anarchism. For now, though, we turn to the relationship between Proudhon, Marx, and anarchism. ▼

Taken from L. van der Walt and M Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 44-81.

167 S. T. Possony, introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. K. Marx and F. Engels (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), xix.

It is our view that the term anarchism should be reserved for a particular rationalist and revolutionary form of libertarian socialism that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Anarchism was against social and economic hierarchy as well as inequality—and specifically, capitalism, landlordism, and the state—and in favour of an international class struggle and revolution from below by a self-organised working class and peasantry in order to create a self-managed, socialist, and stateless social order. In this new order, individual freedom would be harmonised with communal obligations through cooperation, democratic decision making, and social and economic equality, and economic coordination would take place through federal forms. The anarchists stressed the need for revolutionary means (organisations, actions, and ideas) to prefigure the ends (an anarchist society). Anarchism is a libertarian doctrine and a form of libertarian socialism; not every libertarian or libertarian socialist viewpoint is anarchist, though.

Both the anarchist analysis and vision of a better society were underpinned by a rationalist worldview and a commitment to scientific thought, albeit mixed in with a hefty dose of ethics. Anarchism was and is a political ideology, and one that embraces rationalist methods of analysis to inform its critique, strategy, and tactics. Its large moral component, however, is also important—and cannot be scientifically proven to be correct. Just as Marx's claim to have shown exploitation through wage labour in no way proves that exploitation is wrong—that was a moral judgment, not an empirical fact—so Bakunin's and Kropotkin's class analysis did not, in fact, show that individual freedom was right or necessary.

### In Conclusion: The Modernity of Anarchism

It is possible to identify libertarian and libertarian socialist tendencies throughout recorded history, analyse the ideas of each tendency, and examine their historical role. Yet anarchism, we have argued, is not a universal aspect of society or the psyche. It emerged from within the socialist and working-class movement 150 years ago, and its novelty matters. It was also very much a product of modernity, and emerged against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism. The ideas of anarchism themselves ate still profoundly marked by the modern period and modernist thought. Its stress on

It was only with the entry of Bakunin and his circle that Marx's domination began to be challenged. The Alliance, though formally dissolved, continued to operate, and provided the pole around which a growing number of people and currents critical of political socialism began to cohere. The Belgian delegate César de Paepe, the Swiss James Guillaume (1844–1916), Adhémer Schwitzguébel (1844–1895), and the French activist Jean-Louis Pindy (1840–1917) were among those who, along with Bakunin, played a key role in formulating the anarchist conception at the meetings of the First International. Guillaume was a schoolteacher and historian who took an energetic part in the First International, worked closely with Bakunin, withdrew from political activity in 1878, later resurfaced in 1903 as a prominent figure in French syndicalism, and died in 1916.

Bakunin and the Alliance made their first appearance at the 1869 Basel congress of the First International, which Bakunin dominated with his striking oratory and personal force. Bakunin's victory over Marx—centred on the relatively trivial issue of inheritance rights—opened the struggle with Marx in earnest, for Marx had been challenged successfully for the first time on matters of policy and doctrine.<sup>19</sup> This meeting saw important early discussions of syndicalism by Pindy, and a crucial debate on the state by de Paepe and Schwitzguébel.<sup>20</sup>

By 1871, the First International was divided into Marxist and Bakunist sections, and it split the following year along these lines. Both factions subsequently claimed to be the real First International, although the anarchists, who were the large majority of the First International's adherents and sections, and counted among its ranks the largest national federations of sections, certainly had the stronger grounds for their claim. Not every group affiliated with the Bakunist section was anarchist, but the anarchists were the majority in what became known as the “Saint-Imier International,” which lasted until 1877. The Marxist-led faction, headquartered in New York, lingered on until 1876. Bakunin died in 1876, and was buried in Berne, Switzerland.

This new movement, this self-consciously “anarchist” tradition, defined itself from the start in a clear manner, with a detailed social analysis

<sup>19</sup> Joll, *The Anarchists*, 103.

<sup>20</sup> For some of the key documents, see D. Guérin (ed), *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, Book One* (Oakland: AK Press, 1998), 183–202.

along with strategies and tactics to change society. The new doctrine had none of the incoherence often attributed to it. In terms of its intellectual influences, only Proudhon, out of Eltzbacher's other sages, influenced anarchism. Marx, too, was an important influence, although the bitterness between the anarchists and the Marxists led many to downplay his ideas. Godwin and Tolstoy played no role.

While the key figures in the anarchist movement were Bakunin and Kropotkin, neither claimed to be the originator of anarchism, insisting—like subsequent anarchists—that their philosophy stemmed directly from the experiences of the working class and peasantry. Such an identification of the anarchist idea with great individuals has been regarded by anarchists as suggesting infallible texts or teachers, undermining the collectivist nature of anarchism as a social creed rather than an individual revelation, and deifying individuals. When the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (“Free Voice of Labour”), an American Jewish anarchist paper, planned to publish a supplement of Kropotkin photographs, Kropotkin himself objected on the grounds that he refused to be made into an icon.<sup>21</sup>

Both Bakunin and Kropotkin defined anarchism as an anticapitalist ideology and a form of socialism. Bakunin's writings before 1870 tend to use the term revolutionary socialism rather than anarchism, and sharply distinguish his collectivist and antiauthoritarian approach from the authoritarian socialism of Marx. Kropotkin is equally emphatic: “We are communists,” but “our communism is not that of the authoritarian school; it is anarchist communism, communism without government, free communism.”<sup>22</sup> This identification with the socialist movement is extremely significant. Later, of course, many anarchists rejected labels like socialist and communist because of their associations with social democracy and Communism, but this should not be understood to mean that anarchism was not socialist.

In place of capitalism and centralised state control, the anarchists favoured a stateless, self-managed, and planned economy in which the means of production were controlled by the working class and peasantry, class divisions had been abolished, and distribution took place on the basis of need. This would provide a situation of social and economic

21 P. Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 97.

22 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 61.

## Anarchism Redefined: Socialism, Class and Democracy

Having rejected the contention that antistatism and a belief in individual freedom constitute the defining features of anarchism, we have suggested that a more adequate definition of anarchism can be derived from an examination of the intellectual and social trend that defined itself as anarchist from the 1860s onward. Given that antistatism is at best a *necessary* component of anarchist thought, but not a *sufficient* basis on which to classify a set of ideas or a particular thinker as part of the anarchist tradition, it follows that Godwin, Stirner, and Tolstoy cannot truly be considered anarchists. Thinkers and activists who follow in the footsteps of these writers cannot, in turn, be truly considered anarchists or part of the anarchist tradition, even if they may perhaps be considered libertarians.

It follows from there that commonly used categories such as “philosophical anarchism” (often used in reference to Godwin or Tucker), “individualist anarchism” (used in reference to Stirner or the mutualists), “spiritual anarchism” (used in reference to Tolstoy and his cothinkers), or “lifestyle anarchism” (usually used in reference to latter-day Stirnerites) fall away. Because the ideas designated by these names are not part of the anarchist tradition, their categorisation of variants of anarchism is misleading and arises from a misunderstanding of anarchism. Likewise, adding the rider “class struggle” or “social” to the word anarchist implies that there are anarchists who do not favour class struggle or who are individualists, neither of which is an accurate usage.

There is only one anarchist tradition, and it is rooted in the work of Bakunin and the Alliance. The practice of speaking of class struggle anarchism or social anarchism is probably sometimes necessary, but it does imply that there is a legitimate anarchist tradition that is against class struggle or is antisocial, which is incorrect. In a number of polemics, Bookchin set out to distinguish the “social anarchist” tradition from a host of individualist and irrationalist tendencies that have tried to claim the anarchist label, and provided a powerful critique of these currents. Yet Bookchin still referred to these tendencies as “lifestyle anarchism,” conceding their place in a larger anarchist tradition.<sup>166</sup> This was a mistake.

166 Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*.

new morality, such as exploitation. If authority was defined as obedience to a moral principle, anarchism was not against authority; if individual freedom was defined as freedom from every restriction, anarchists were not in favour of individual freedom.<sup>163</sup> Bakunin and Kropotkin tended to assume that in an egalitarian and libertarian social order, based on values of equality, solidarity, and responsible individuality, crime would generally decline sharply.<sup>164</sup> Inequality would not exist to prompt desperate theft and acts of violence; ruthless competition would no longer exist to generate rage and violence; the envy and greed of the capitalist market would not exist to generate ruthless acquisition.

Nonetheless, some crime would still exist. An open and libertarian economic and social order would provide numerous avenues for conflict resolution in cases of minor crimes. It was also suggested that the power of public pressure would restrain people from criminal actions, and the withdrawal of cooperation would suffice to discourage the repetitions of such actions when they occurred. The existence of a popular militia and a dense network of associational life would also tend to prevent crime, as the isolation and alienation of modern society would be a thing of the past.

In more serious cases, the militia could be invoked to intervene, and some form of trial would presumably take place within a structure set up for this purpose. If the criminal was found to be mentally ill and therefore could not be held accountable for their actions, the solution would be some form of medical treatment. Otherwise, some measures would have to be taken: possibly compensation, maybe a period of isolation or exile, or perhaps permanent expulsion from the anarchist society. The use of prisons was, however, out of the question; as Kropotkin argued, they created new evils, acting as “schools of crime” and abuse that transformed their inmates into habitual offenders.<sup>165</sup>

163 See R. B. Fowler, ‘The Anarchist Tradition of Political Thought,’ *Western Political Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1972): 741–42. Fowler—who accepted the canon of the seven sages—nonetheless rejected the notion that anarchism could be adequately defined as an opposition to the state or the exaltation of the individual. As an alternative, he suggested that anarchism be defined as a revolt against ‘convention’ in favour of ‘natural truth’; *ibid.*, 747, 749. This approach, however, fails to come to terms with the socialist character of anarchism.

164 See, *inter alia*, M. Bakunin, ‘The Revolutionary Catechism,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1866; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971); P. Kropotkin, *Organised Vengeance Called Justice: The Superstition of Government* (London: Freedom Press, 1902).

165 P. Kropotkin, ‘Prisons and Their Moral Influence on Prisoners,’ in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin*, ed. R. N. Baldwin (1877; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 220–21, 235.

equality that would enable genuine individual freedom to exist. There was no sign of any hankering after the premodern era; the anarchists aimed at a rational, democratic, and modern society.

## Against Hierarchy

The basic premise of all of the anarchist arguments was a deep and fundamental commitment to individual freedom. For the anarchists, however, freedom could only exist, and be exercised, in society; equally, unequalitarian and hierarchical social structures made freedom impossible. It followed that the anarchist ideal was a society based on social and economic equality as well as self-management, in which individual freedom could truly exist. Bakunin declared that the anarchist “insists on his positive rights to life and all of its intellectual, moral and physical joys” because “he loves life and wants to enjoy it in all of its abundance.”<sup>23</sup>

It is simply not true to claim, like E. H. Carr in his rather hostile biography, that Bakunin was an extreme individualist influenced by Stirner.<sup>24</sup> Bakunin envisaged freedom as a product of society, not a revolt against society by individuals, arguing,

Society, far from decreasing... freedom, on the contrary creates the individual freedom of all human beings. Society is the root, the tree, and liberty is its fruit. Hence, in every epoch, man must seek his freedom not at the beginning but at the end of history... I can feel free only in the presence of, and in relation with other men...

I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free, and the freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.<sup>25</sup>

23 M. Bakunin, ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1867; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 118.

24 E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (Rev. ed. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1975), 434. Carr attributes this to the supposedly profound influence that Stirner had on Bakunin. There is no evidence that Stirner had any influence on Bakunin, least of all in Carr’s study.

25 M. Bakunin, ‘God and the State’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1867; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 236–37.

He saw the struggle against extreme individualism as an essential part of the anarchist project: “In every Congress” of the First International, “we have fought the individualists... who claim, along with the moralists and bourgeois economists, that man can be free... outside of society... He is... a social animal... Only in society can he become a human being... freedom... is the product of the collectivity.”<sup>26</sup>

Along similar lines, Kropotkin rejected the “misanthropic bourgeois individualism” he identified with people like Stirner.<sup>27</sup> This approach, of every person for herself or himself, was not freedom at all but simply the right of the strong to oppress the weak. What Kropotkin favoured instead was “true individuality” which could only be developed “through practising the highest communist sociability” It “is easy to see” that Stirner’s approach was simply a “disguised return” of “privileged minorities.” The “privileged minorities” could only survive if backed by a state power, and so “the claims of these individualists necessarily end in a return to the state idea and to that same coercion which they so fiercely attack.”<sup>28</sup>

In other words, genuine individual freedom and individuality could only exist in a free society. The anarchists did not therefore identify freedom with the right of everybody to do exactly what one pleased but with a social order in which collective effort and responsibilities — that is to say, obligations — would provide the material basis and social nexus in which individual freedom could exist. This is entirely at odds with Stirner’s views. Stirner believed that “the egoist” thinks “only of himself,” only of “my cause” and not of anything more, whether that be “the Good Cause, then God’s cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice; further, the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland; finally, even the cause of Mind, and a thousand other causes.” The “name of egoist” must be applied to the “man who, instead of living

26 M. Bakunin, ‘Three Lectures to Swiss Members of the International’ in *Mikhail Bakunin: From out of the Dustbin: Bakunin’s Basic Writings, 1869–1871*, ed. R. M. Cutler (1871; repr., Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), 46–47.

27 P. Kropotkin, ‘Letter to Nettlau’ March 5, 1902, in *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution: P. A. Kropotkin*, ed. M. A. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 296–97.

28 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism’ in *Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets: A Collection of Writings by Peter Kropotkin*, ed. R. N. Baldwin (1912; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 161–62.

## Crime and Social Order

Woodcock’s claim that anarchists opposed majority rule and direct democracy is, when seen against this backdrop, most unconvincing. Bakunin was quite clear that “we too seek cooperation: we are even convinced that cooperation in every branch of labour and science is going to be the prevailing form of social organisation in the future.”<sup>161</sup> Anarchism would be nothing less than the most complete realisation of *democracy* — democracy in the fields, factories, and neighbourhoods, coordinated through federal structures and councils from below upward, and based on economic and social equality. With the “abolition of the state,” Bakunin commented the “spontaneous self-organisation of popular life, for centuries paralysed and absorbed by the omnipotent power of the state, would revert to the communes” — that is, to self-governing neighbourhoods, towns, cities, and villages.<sup>162</sup>

An anarchist society must also include a measure of legitimate coercive power exercised against those who committed harmful acts against the commonwealth — that is, acts against the social order and the freedom of other individuals. In particular, the linkage between rights and duties had to be maintained. Given that the anarchist society would be a voluntary association, membership assumed a basic commitment to the goals and values of that society.

Those who disagreed with those values were under no obligation to remain within a society with which they were at odds; equally, that society was under no obligation to maintain such persons. To allow some to enjoy the rights and benefits of a cooperative commonwealth, while allowing these same individuals to refuse to fulfil their duties according to their abilities, was tantamount to resurrecting social and economic inequalities and exploitation — precisely the evils of class that the new world was meant to abolish. Likewise, to allow some individuals to disregard the rights and freedoms of others — even if they otherwise fulfilled their social duties would amount to a restoration of hierarchy.

An anarchist society would be well within its rights to exercise legitimate coercive power against harmful acts — acts criminal in the manner that they are understood today, such as rape or murder, or in terms of the

161 M. Bakunin, ‘On Cooperation,’ in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, Book One*, ed. D. Guérin (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 181–82.

162 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 207.

Subsequent research has challenged Hobsbawm's analysis as flawed "on virtually every point," perhaps as a consequence of Hobsbawm's general hostility to anarchism.<sup>155</sup> In Spain, as elsewhere, anarchism acted as a culture of "radical popular enlightenment" that placed a "high premium on scientific knowledge and technological advance" and "expounded continually on such themes as evolution, rationalist cosmologies, and the value of technology in liberating humanity."<sup>156</sup> This goes back to Bakunin and his circle. Contrary to the view that he disparaged formal education and Enlightenment ideals, Bakunin was a rationalist and modernist.<sup>157</sup> As Bookchin described him,

Like virtually all of the intellectuals of his day, he acknowledged the importance of science as a means of promoting eventual human betterment; hence the embattled atheism and anti clericalism that pervades all his writings. By the same token, he demanded that the scientific and technological resources of society be mobilised in support of social cooperation, freedom, and community, instead of being abused for profit, competitive advantage, and war. In this respect, Mikhail Bakunin was not behind his times, but a century or two ahead of them.<sup>158</sup>

The rationalist impulse in anarchism—which locates anarchism firmly within the modern world, rather than the premodern ones of moral philosophy and religion, and situates it, moreover, in the world of nineteenth-century socialism—was shared with the mutualists and Godwin, with his stress on reason and the belief that even politics could be a precise science.<sup>159</sup> Rationalism was, however, absent from the thinking of Tolstoy and Stirner; Stirner was a relativist for whom "truth awaits and receives everything from you, and itself is only through you; for it exists only—in your head."<sup>160</sup>

155 J. R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), especially 1–9, 217ff.

156 Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 13–14, 58.

157 Compare to M. Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 33.

158 Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 29–30.

159 See, for example, W. Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, with Selections from Godwin's Other Writings* (ed. and abridged by K. Cordell Carter, 1978; repr., London: Clarendon Press, 1971), 18, 68, 98, 147, 327.

160 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 471–72.

to an idea,—i.e. a spiritual thing," is always "sacrificing it to his personal advantage."<sup>29</sup>

Between the notion of freedom articulated by Stirner and that of the anarchists lies an abyss. For Bakunin, a person's "duties to society are indissolubly linked with his rights."<sup>30</sup> The watchwords of popular emancipation were freedom and solidarity. Such solidarity was "the spontaneous product of social life, economic as well as moral; the result of the free federation of common interests, aspirations and tendencies." Most important, he emphasised, it "has as its essential basis *equality and collective labour*—obligatory not by law, but by the force of realities—and collective property."<sup>31</sup> Kropotkin likewise insisted that "all must be put on the same footing as producers and consumers of wealth," and "everybody" must contribute to "the common well-being to the full extent of his capacities."<sup>32</sup>

Such, in short, was the aim of anarchism: not "misanthropic bourgeois individualism" but a deep love of freedom, understood as a social product, a deep respect for human rights, a profound celebration of humankind and its potential, and a commitment to a form of society where a "true individuality" was irrevocably linked to "the highest communist sociability." This interlinking of rights and duties opens the door to the exercise of a degree of *legitimate* coercive power in an anarchist society—an issue that will be examined below.<sup>33</sup>

The anarchist view that freedom was exercised through and implied obligations to society was not shared by Godwin, who saw society as a threat to freedom and looked forward to a world of isolated rational

29 M. Stirner, *The Ego and His Own* (1844; repr., New York: Benjamin R. Tucker Publishers, 1907), 3, 37.

30 Bakunin, 'Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,' 118.

31 M. Bakunin, 'Letter to *La Liberté*,' in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1872; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 289.

32 Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Communism,' 56, 59.

33 It is therefore incorrect to define anarchism as a philosophy that holds that every individual should be entirely free to establish one's obligations to society; given that anarchism advocated a social vision of freedom as realised through society and cooperation, it could not be in favour of absolute and unrestrained individual sovereignty. This misreading of anarchism as a doctrine of absolute autonomy is the key flaw in R. P. Wolfe, *In Defence of Anarchism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970). While an interesting treatise, it is not really a treatise on anarchism.

individuals. Stirner was also an individualist, but of rather a different sort than Godwin. He believed that unbridled self-interest was the only true value, and saw idealism as a cynical mask, celebrated criminals, and claimed might made right: “Everything over which I have might that cannot be torn from me remains my property; well, then let might decide about property; and I will expect everything from my might!”<sup>34</sup> Here, freedom was not a withdrawal from society but a doctrine of revolt against others.

### Against Capitalism and Landlordism

The anarchists aimed, said Bakunin, “to organise society in such a manner that every individual, man or woman, should find, upon entering life, approximately equal means for the development of his or her diverse faculties and their utilization in his or her work.”<sup>35</sup> And “freedom,” he wrote, is “above all, eminently social, because it can only be realised in society and by the strictest equality and solidarity among men.”<sup>36</sup> “A person who is dying from starvation, who is crushed by poverty, who every day is on the point of death from cold and hunger and who sees everyone he loves suffering likewise but is unable to come to their aid, is not free; that person is a slave.”<sup>37</sup>

But such a free society did *not* exist yet. Every individual did not find “upon entering life” equal access to the means of life but instead a world scarred by inequality and privilege; for the wealthy few, life could be a joy, but for the mass of the people, for the working class and peasantry, it was a struggle to survive, a world of destitution among plenty. “True individuality” simply could not exist for ordinary people under the existing social conditions, for equality and solidarity did not exist.

At the heart of the problem were typically interlocked systems of class domination and exploitation. Most obviously, there were the systems of capitalism and landlordism. For the anarchists, the capitalists or bourgeoisie were powerful in the modern world, but where economies were less developed, older precapitalist landowning elites (generally

social organisation” that was “carried out from the bottom up, by free association, with unions and localities federated by communes, regions, nations, and, finally, a great universal and international federation.”<sup>151</sup>

Federalism linking neighbourhoods and workplaces, producers with other producers as well as consumers, would allow large-scale but participatory and democratic economic planning. There would not be a state coordinating production from above through a central plan or a market coordinating production through the price system but a vast economic federation of self-managing enterprises and communities, with a supreme assembly at its head that would balance supply and demand, and direct and distribute world production on the basis of demands from below. The anarchists favoured, as Daniel Guérin astutely noted, worldwide planning based on “federalist and noncoercive centralisation.”<sup>152</sup> For Rocker,

What we seek is not world exploitation but a world economy in which every group of people shall find its natural place and enjoy equal rights with all others. Hence, internationalisation of natural resources and territory affording raw materials is one of the most important prerequisites for the existence of a socialistic order based on libertarian principles... We need to call into being a new human community having its roots in equality of economic conditions and uniting all members of the great cultural community by new ties of mutual interest, disregarding the frontiers of the present states.<sup>153</sup>

We mentioned above Bakunin and Kropotkin’s commitment to rationalism along with the use of advanced technologies in the new society. This arose partly from a broader anarchist commitment to rationalist and scientific ways of thinking. The notion—presented, for example, in Eric Hobsbawm’s research on the Spanish anarchists—that the anarchist movement was millenarian and irrational is not sustainable.<sup>154</sup>

34 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 339.

35 M. Bakunin, *The Capitalist System* (1871; repr., Champaign, IL: Libertarian Labor Review, 1993), n.p.

36 Bakunin, ‘God and the State,’ 238.

37 Bakunin, ‘Three Lectures to Swiss Members of the International,’ 46.

151 Bakunin, ‘The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,’ 270.

152 Guérin, *Anarchism*, 55, 153.

153 Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 527.

154 E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); see also E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London: Abacus, 1977).

A few anarchists after Bakunin and Kropotkin evidently believed that this required an almost total decentralisation of production and the creation of self-sufficient local economies—a position that raises many doubts. Even at a local level, total autonomy is not possible. Decisions regarding which goods to produce, for example, obviously affect consumers who are not involved in production. The more sophisticated an economy, the more every workplace forms part of a complex chain of production and distribution. Many services also cannot be produced and consumed only at a local level, such as transportation and communications. Finally, unequal resource endowments mean that it is difficult to envisage industrial production taking place on the basis of local autonomy and isolation, and points to the danger of reproducing regional and international disparities in income and living standards.

Bakunin and Kropotkin were keenly aware of these problems, and certainly did not envision an international anarchist revolution creating a world of isolated villages. Seeing the new society as making use of the most advanced technologies, and aware of the possibility that regional unevenness would provide a recipe for future conflicts, they saw the need to plan distribution and production, and coordinate production chains as well as large-scale public services. Free federation between local groups was seen as the key means of allowing coordination and exchange without a state or market. Councils of mandated delegates accountable to local groups would link the federation.

Bakunin stressed that “revolutionary delegations” from “all the rebel countries” would help knit together the “free federation of agricultural and industrial associations” from “the bottom up.” Society would be “reorganised” “from the bottom up through the free formation and free federation of worker associations, industrial, agricultural, scientific and artistic alike,” “free federations founded upon collective ownership of the land, capital, raw materials and the instruments of labour.”<sup>149</sup> Kropotkin expected multitudes of organisations to exist, ranging from chess clubs to scientific societies, and that they would link up with one another.<sup>150</sup> Federation would also allow association on the basis of national and cultural interests and differences, and form part of a “future

149 M. Bakunin, ‘Worker Association and Self-Management,’ in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, Book One*, ed. D. Guérin (January 3, 1872; repr., Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 182.

150 See, for example, Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, chapters 8, 9, 11.

hereditary aristocracies or nobilities) also played an important role. It is not possible to understand the anarchist position on the peasantry unless it is noted that the socialist impulse in anarchism was not simply an anticapitalist one but entailed a critique of landed wealth as well.

The capitalists and landlords were two elites that could easily coexist—indeed, many of the great landholders developed into rural capitalists—and it is in this context that the common use of the term “middle class” to refer to capitalists in nineteenth-century anarchist writing must be understood. They did not use the term middle class in either of the ways common in the twentieth century—to signify relatively comfortable layers of society, or to refer to the middling layers of professionals, small business people, and middle management—but rather to distinguish the new capitalists from the aristocrats. The same usage may also be found in older Marxist writing, yet has generally fallen away in later years.

The landlords and capitalists made up a substantial part of the ruling class of the modern world, but there was a third element to this class, according to the anarchists: the managers of the state apparatus. This “bureaucratic aristocracy,” these “cynical bureaucratic martinets,” were also “enemies of the people,” and just as involved in the domination and exploitation of the popular classes.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, presidents, kings, generals, members of parliament, directors, and mayors were as much a part of the ruling class as the industrialists.

Landlordism and capitalism were directly responsible for making the “strictest equality and solidarity” impossible. Anarchists identified the peasantry as victims of landlordism: because the peasantry did not generally own their own land, they were compelled to pay rents in the form of labour, produce, or money where a landlord or corporation held title, or pay taxes where the state or the peasant held land title. In both cases, the peasantry were compelled to turn over a significant part of their produce to the dominant groups for the right of farming the land on which they lived. And in order to survive, the peasantry were often compelled to borrow money, particularly in lean seasons, and sell goods on the market at low prices in good seasons with bumper harvests; many were, in addition, compelled to enter wage labour to make ends meet.

38 Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 343.

Trapped in a web of domination and exploitation, the peasantry constituted an oppressed class. As Kropotkin declared,

But the golden age is over for the small farmer. Today he hardly knows how to make ends meet. He gets into debt, becomes a victim of the cattle-dealer, the real-estate jobber, the usurer; notes and mortgages ruin whole villages, even more than the frightful taxes imposed by State and commune. Small proprietorship is in a dreadful condition; and even if the small farmer is still owner in name, he is in fact nothing more than a tenant paying rent to money-dealers and usurers.<sup>39</sup>

Bakunin noted the peasants' "instinctive hatred of the 'fine gentlemen' and... bourgeois landlords, who enjoy the bounty of the earth without cultivating it with their own hands."<sup>40</sup> Kropotkin complained of the injustice of a system in which a person may only farm if "he gives up part of [the] product to the landlord."<sup>41</sup>

The system of landlordism was as intolerable as capitalism, which oppressed the working class. The problem with capitalism was not its use of modern technology, for the anarchists were greatly in favour of new technologies that could eliminate drudgery and reduce working time. The problem was the pervasive social injustice and oppressive hierarchy embedded in the class system. In other words, the problems lay in the economic and social relations under which technology was used, not with the technology itself.

Capitalists and state officials controlled the means of production and dominated capitalist production. Asked Bakunin, "Is it necessary to repeat here the irrefutable arguments of Socialism which no bourgeois economist has yet succeeded in disproving?" "Property" and "capital" in "their present form" meant that "the capitalist and the property owner" had the power and the right, guaranteed by the state, to "live without working," while the worker was already "in the position of a serf."<sup>42</sup> (In

39 Quoted in P. Eltzbacher, *Anarchism: Exponents of the Anarchist Philosophy* (1900; repr., London: Freedom Press, 1960), 108.

40 M. Bakunin, 'Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,' in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1870; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 189.

41 Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Communism,' 55.

42 Bakunin, *The Capitalist System*, n.p.

But this confuses the violence and coercion used to create and maintain an unjust situation, and the violence of resistance. It is somewhat akin to treating murder and self-defence as identical.

It is on this point that anarchists differed sharply from Tolstoy's doctrine. Tolstoy advocated non-resistance. But even anarchist pacifists practice resistance and seek to coerce the class enemy, albeit peacefully. For Tolstoy, religious contemplation, rather than direct action, was key. As for Stirner, his message was "personal insurrection rather than general revolution."<sup>146</sup> Indeed, he had no real interest in the actual abolition of the state: "My object is not the overthrow of an established order but my elevation above it, my purpose and deed are not... political or social but... directed toward myself and my ownness alone... an egoistic purpose and deed."<sup>147</sup> Stirner's own project, in fact, emerged in a debate with the socialism of Wilhelm Weitling and Moses Hess in which he invoked egoism against socialism.<sup>148</sup>

## For a New World

As discussed above, the anarchists stress the need to create a new social order based on social and economic equality, self-management, and individual freedom, sometimes termed "anarchist communism," libertarian socialism, or libertarian communism. The actual details of the new society are often vague, but they can certainly be distinguished from the policies of the old East bloc. Libertarian socialism would be a social order that allowed genuine individual freedom, achieved through cooperation, to exist. It would be international, not "anarchism in one country." and stateless, with production, distribution, and general administration carried out from below through self-management.

Democratic local groups at the workplace and in the neighbourhood would be the nucleus of the social movement that would create libertarian socialism. As the revolution took place, these groups would form the basis of the new society. Wherever possible, these groups would deal with local matters in their own way, democratically—for instance, to determine working hours, local parks, school festivals, and so forth.

146 Martin, introduction, xviii.

147 Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, 421.

148 M. Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), 54.

revocable mandates,” and the “extension of the revolutionary force” within and between the “rebel countries.”<sup>143</sup> The workers and peasants, he declared, would unite by “federating the fighting battalions,” so that “district by district” there would be a common coordinated defence against internal and external enemies.<sup>144</sup>

Most anarchists and syndicalists seemed to accept this general approach. Some certainly hoped that the revolution would be as peaceful as possible, and many underestimated the extent of armed resistance that the ruling classes would certainly mount. There were, however, some among the syndicalists who believed that the revolutionary general strike would enable a peaceful revolution; there were also a small number of pacifist anarchists who believed that violence in any form was both unnecessary and unacceptable, in that it generated a new apparatus of privilege and power. We will discuss the debates on the defence of the revolution in more detail in chapters 6 and 7.

What is important to note at this stage is that the broad anarchist tradition accepted a measure of coercion. This is a key issue, ignored by approaches that reduce anarchism to individualism and antistatism, or define anarchism as an opposition to any constraints on any individual. A basic distinction is drawn, usually implicitly, in anarchist thinking between *hierarchical* power and exploitation, which exercises force and coercion to perpetuate a basically unjust and inequitable society, and legitimate coercive power, derived from collective and democratic decision making used to create and sustain a libertarian and socialist order. The former category refers to the *repressive* actions of the dominant classes and their institutional complexes; the latter refers to *resistance* and emancipatory direct action.

These two simply should not be collapsed as undifferentiated “authoritarianism,” as Engels suggested. He believed the anarchists to be hypocritical in opposing “authority” while advocating revolution: “A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part.”<sup>145</sup>

143 M Bakunin, ‘The Programme of the International Brotherhood,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1869; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 152–54.

144 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 190.

145 F. Engels, ‘On Authority,’ in *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*, ed. N. Y. Kolpinsky (1873; repr., Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 102–5.

comparing the Worker to a serf, Bakunin was referring to the unfree peasants of feudal Europe who were legally bound to particular estates and unable to move freely).

This was a system of exploitation, which the anarchists evidently understood as the transfer of resources from a productive class to a dominant but unproductive one. Exploitation in the capitalist system took place at work and through the wage system. The worker was paid a wage that in theory covered one’s basic needs. Yet the actual value produced by the worker at work was always higher than the wage received by the worker; a baking worker, for example, might help produce several hundred loaves of bread per day, but would receive the cash equivalent of perhaps two loaves of bread per day. The difference went to the capitalist who owned the bakery.

Unlike the serf, the worker was controlled in part through the labour market; lacking property on which to subsist, the worker was forced to work for another, and as Bakunin put it, the “terrible threat of starvation which daily hangs over his head and over his family, will force him to accept any conditions imposed by the gainful calculations of the capitalist.” Private property in the means of production therefore meant, for Bakunin, “the power and the right to live by exploiting the work of someone else, the right to exploit the work of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both.”<sup>43</sup> For Kropotkin, “Owing to our wage system” the “sudden increase in our powers of production... resulted only in an unprecedented accumulation of wealth in the hands of the owners of capital; while an increase in misery for great numbers, and an insecurity of life for all, has been the lot of the workmen.” It was a “sad mockery” and a “misrepresentation,” said Kropotkin, to call the labour contract a “free contract,” for the worker accepted the contract from “sheer necessity,” the “force” of need.<sup>44</sup>

The serfs at least had direct control over the work process and managed many of their affairs through the village. The wageworker did not. The drive to maximise exploitation was always wedded to authoritarian workplace regimes. For “once the contract has been negotiated,” Bakunin argued, “the serfdom of the workers is doubly increased,”

43 Ibid.

44 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 71.

because the “merchandise” that the worker had “sold to his employer” was “his labour, his personal services, the productive forces of his body, mind, and spirit that are found in him and are inseparable from his person—it is therefore himself”:

From then on, the employer will watch over him, either directly or by means of overseers; every day during working hours and under controlled conditions, the employer will be the owner of his actions and movements. When he is told: “Do this,” the worker is obligated to do it; or he is told: “Go there,” he must go. Is this not what is called a serf?<sup>45</sup>

Finally, domination through both the labour market and labour process was often supplemented by various forms of extraeconomic coercion that were used to control and bond labour: debt, controls over movement, forced labour, and so forth.

Linked to these issues was the question of distribution. Under capitalism, goods and services were distributed through the market; they were commodities that had to be bought before they could be used. Access was conditional on the ability to *pay*, rather than on actual need. An unemployed person without a wage had no specific right to the goods or services one needed to survive, while the wages of the employed workers were at best just able to cover one’s basic needs. One result was an apparent situation of “overproduction”: more goods and services were produced than could be sold, because the working class, a sizable part of the population’ had such limited purchasing power. Another was war and imperial conquest. Kropotkin argued that a system where workers were “unable to purchase with their wages the riches they are producing,” an artificial situation of overproduction, resulted in “wars, continuous wars... for supremacy in the world market,” as each country sought new markets for its surplus goods and services to the elites of other countries.<sup>46</sup>

From the above it is quite clear that the class issue—what Bakunin called the “social question”—was uppermost in the minds of the anarchist movement. The anarchists, consequently, viewed class struggle as a necessary part of social change, and saw in the victims of class

<sup>45</sup> Bakunin, *The Capitalist System*, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 55–56.

A revolution is infinitely more than a series of insurrections... is more than a simple fight between parties, however sanguinary; more than mere street-fighting, and much more than a mere change of government... A revolution is a swift overthrow, in a few years, of institutions which have taken centuries to root into the soil, and seem so fixed and immovable that even the most ardent reformers hardly dare to attack them in their writings...

In short, it is the birth of completely new ideas concerning the manifold links in citizenship—conceptions which soon become realities, and then begin to spread among the neighbouring nations, convulsing the world and giving to the succeeding age its watchword, its problems, its science, its lines of economic, political and moral development.<sup>142</sup>

This brings us to the complicated issue of the use of force and violence in the revolution. For Bakunin and Kropotkin, the revolution would certainly always involve some violence, the result of the resistance of the old order to the new. It would thus, sadly but unavoidably, be necessary to organise for the armed self-defence of the masses; the alternative would be brutal counterrevolution. The two anarchists believed that military action had to reflect libertarian forms of organisation as far as possible, and that the functions of self-defence had to be carried out by a large proportion of the population in order to prevent the emergence of a separate armed and hierarchical force that could be the seed of a new state. In place of a modern hierarchical army, they advocated a militia, democratic in content and popular in character, in which officers would be elected and should have no special privileges. This would not be a dictatorship of the proletariat in the classical Marxist sense but the armed self-defence of the organs of revolutionary counterpower created by the popular classes; it was not a state, at least as the anarchists understood the term.

Bakunin stressed the need for the “dissolution of the army, the judicial system... the police,” to be replaced by “permanent barricades,” coordination through deputies with “always responsible, and always

<sup>142</sup> Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution, 1789–1973*, volume 1, ed. A. M. Bonanno (1909; repr., London: Elephant Editions, 1986), 22–23.

internal democracy, self-management, and as far as possible, social and economic equality, and its goals could not be achieved through authoritarianism and hierarchy. Such a movement could obviously not take the form of a political party aimed at taking state power, an elite vanguard party aimed at establishing revolutionary dictatorship, or a guerrilla movement aimed at imposing itself on the masses.

What was critical was a movement for self-emancipation by and for the working class and peasantry, an expression of the organised will of the popular classes, which would themselves be the architects of the new order rather than the passive recipients of salvation from above. The revolution, Kropotkin argued, could only be “a widespread popular movement” in “every town and village,” in which the masses “take upon themselves the task of rebuilding society” through associations operating on democratic and antihierarchical principles.<sup>137</sup> To look above to leaders or the state for freedom was simply to prepare the ground for the rise of a ruling class. “Free workers require a free organisation,” and this organisation must be based on “free agreement and free cooperation, without sacrificing the autonomy of the individual to the all-pervading influence of a state,” asserted Kropotkin.<sup>138</sup>

The “material conditions” and “needs” of the popular classes generated, contended Bakunin, a fundamental antagonism to capitalism and landlordism as well as the state, and a desire for “material well-being” and to “live and work [in] an atmosphere of freedom” created the potential to remake the world through revolution.<sup>139</sup> Yet this was not enough. The popular classes were “poverty-stricken and discontented,” but in the depths of the “utmost poverty” often “fail to show signs of stirring.”<sup>140</sup> What was missing was a “new social philosophy,” a “new faith” in the possibility of a new social order and the ability of ordinary people to create such a society.<sup>141</sup> A revolutionary counterculture embodying the “new faith” was vital, according to Kropotkin, and it distinguished revolutions from sporadic outbreaks and revolts:

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137 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism,’ 188.

138 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 52.

139 Bakunin, ‘The Policy of the International,’ 166–67.

140 Bakunin ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 209; see also Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 335.

141 Bakunin ‘The Programme of the Alliance,’ 249, 250–51.

domination and exploitation — the working class and peasantry — the agents of that change. Capitalism was no mere “limited region” of “economic organisation” over which the anarchists could not agree, as Woodcock suggests.<sup>47</sup> It was, and remains, at the heart of the anarchist critique of the modern world. Miller’s assertion that while the anarchists opposed “existing economic systems” they differed on the question of whether to abolish capitalism or institute a resolutely free market is equally problematic, as is Marshall’s attempt to find a home in the anarchist tradition for those extreme liberals who adopt the oxymoron “anarcho-capitalist.”<sup>48</sup>

Economic liberalism, with its belief that a competitive free market based on maximising self-interest produces optimal results for most people — the idea central to its current incarnation as neoliberalism — is not anarchist. Stirner, who translated into German Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and the writings of Smith’s French disciple, J. B. Say, was not an advocate of the free market, despite Marshall’s claim to the contrary.<sup>49</sup> What he shared with economic liberalism, however, was the notion that the unrestricted pursuit of personal advantage is a virtue in itself, a basic sentiment of laissez-faire capitalism.

The anarchists, by contrast, had nothing but contempt for capitalism and loathed economic liberals. Bakunin referred to economic liberals as the “passionate lovers of all freedom which they can use to their advantage” who “demand the unlimited right to exploit the proletariat and bitterly resent state interference.”<sup>50</sup> Kropotkin rejected the “middle class economists” who promoted the doctrine of the free market, in which the state should refrain from involving itself in the economy. “While giving the capitalist any degree of free scope to amass his wealth at the expense of the helpless labourers, the government has *never and nowhere...* afforded the labourers the opportunity to ‘do as they pleased.’” In a class system, the free market was nothing but a means to exploitation, something to be put aside whenever it suited the ruling class: “‘Non-interference,’ and more than non-interference, — direct support, help and protection, — existed only in the interests of the exploiters.”<sup>51</sup>

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47 Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 13, 15, 19.

48 Miller, *Anarchism*, 5–10; Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 641, 653.

49 Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 229, 232.

50 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 216–17.

51 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism,’ 182–83.

## Against the State

For the anarchists, the class system, affecting the majority of people, was the most fundamental obstacle to true individuality. Many commentators, both hostile and sympathetic, have nonetheless reduced anarchism to antistatism. According to Engels, the anarchists argued that “it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist only has his capital by grace of the state... the state is the chief evil... which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself.”<sup>52</sup> This approach fails to understand *why* anarchists opposed the state. It cannot be claimed that anarchists rejected the state simply because it imposed social order and rules, nor that they attribute all social ills to the state.

Rather, the anarchist critique of the state arises partly from an opposition to hierarchy and partly from a class outlook. The state is seen as a defender of the class system and a centralised body that necessarily concentrates power in the hands of the ruling classes; in both respects, it is the means through which a *minority* rules a majority. It follows that the abolition of the state is one of the preconditions for a libertarian and socialist order. The view that the state was an organ of class domination was one that anarchists shared with Marxists. But there were also critical differences between the traditions. The state, Bakunin argued,

has always been the patrimony of some privileged class or other; a priestly class, an aristocratic class, a bourgeois class. And finally, when all the other classes have exhausted themselves, the state becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class and then falls—or, if you will, rises—to the position of a machine; but it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of the state that there should be some privileged class devoted to its preservation.<sup>53</sup>

For Kropotkin, the state was nothing but the concentrated power of the ruling class, and in the modern period, “the chief bulwark of capital.”<sup>54</sup>

52 F. Engels, ‘Letter to C. Cuno in Milan,’ January 24, 1872, in *Marx, Engels, Lenin: Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*, ed. N. Y. Kolpinsky (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 71.

53 M. Bakunin, ‘The International and Karl Marx,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1872; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 318.

54 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism,’ 149–50, 181.

people like Godwin, Stirner, and Proudhon. Both Godwin and Stirner made an abstract individual the centre of their analysis, and generally paid little attention to the social context that made freedom possible. Godwin wanted an end to private property because it hindered the development of reason, while Stirner did not see socialism as a goal. Proudhon was an outspoken misogynist and antifeminist who believed that a “woman knows enough if she knows enough to mend our shirts and cook us a steak.”<sup>135</sup> His views were also infused with nationalist and racial prejudices. We will examine the broad anarchist tradition and its relationship to issues of race, imperialism, and gender in more depth in chapter 10.

## Counterpower and Counterculture

For the anarchists, class struggle had to be antistatist and antiauthoritarian; it had to be a self-managed struggle conducted outside of and against the state, as noted earlier. The state was an instrument created for the domination of the few over the many, and Bakunin argued that anarchists sought the “destruction of the state” as an “immediate” goal, for the “state means domination, and any domination presupposes the subjugation of the masses” and a “ruling minority.”<sup>136</sup> It was also particularly important that the struggle for a new society embody within itself the seeds of the new order, so that the basic framework of the new society would have already been created within and through the struggle against the old order of things.

The character of the revolution was in large part *prefigured* by the ideas and practices of the movements of the popular classes that preexisted it, and its course was shaped by the actions of those movements. This required the creation of organs of counterpower able to supplant the organs of ruling class power, and the creation of a revolutionary counterculture that rejected the values of the status quo. If organisations and ideas are crucial, and they come together through direct action, and if the struggle must prefigure the future society, then the organisations, actions, and ideas have to be consistent with anarchism.

The anarchists maintained that the means shape the ends. The movement for revolution had to contain all the key values of anarchism:

135 Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 256.

136 Bakunin, ‘Letter to *La Liberté*,’ 276–77.

'self-determination'... also fails to solve the national problem" itself; "it merely creates it anew."<sup>129</sup> Maximoff, who graduated as an agronomist in 1915 in Petrograd, became involved in the revolutionary movement of his day.<sup>130</sup> He played a key role in the Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda and the subsequent Confederation of Russian Anarcho-syndicalists, and edited the weekly *Golas Truda* ("Voice of Labour"). The paper had been initially published in the United States as the organ of the anarcho-syndicalist Union of Russian Workers, a group with around ten thousand members.<sup>131</sup> In 1917, it was transplanted to revolutionary Russia. Maximoff was forced into exile from Russia in 1921, but he remained an important part of the anarchist movement in Germany, France, and the United States.

For Bakunin, then, the achievement of national liberation had to be linked to the broader struggle for an international revolution. If nationality was separate from the state and a natural feature of society, it did not need the state for emancipation, and as Bakunin argued, the unity of a nationality could only occur naturally, and could not be created from above through statist projects of "nation-building."<sup>132</sup> Equally, if liberation from national oppression involved class struggle, then it could not stop at the borders of a state or even a nationality but had to be part of a broader international struggle. A social revolution must be international in scope, and oppressed nationalities "must therefore link their aspirations and forces with the aspirations and forces of all other countries."<sup>133</sup> Given this perspective, most (but by no means all) anarchists were hostile to nationalism: "All nationalism is reactionary in nature, for it strives to enforce on the separate parts of the great human family a definite character according to a preconceived idea."<sup>134</sup>

The anarchist stress on the importance of creating substantive equality through a new social order that was both libertarian and socialist, and on internationalism, also differentiates anarchism from the ideas of

129 G. P. Maximoff, *The Programme of Anarcho-syndicalism* (1927; repr., Sydney: Monty Miller, 1985), 46, 47.

130 P. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 139–40.

131 P. Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 127.

132 Bakunin, 'Statism and Anarchy,' 34l.

133 Ibid., 342–43; see also 34l.

134 Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture*, 213.

Bakunin was certainly convinced that a parliamentary system was preferable to a dictatorship because it allowed more scope for individual freedom and popular self-activity:

We are firmly convinced it is true that the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy. In a republic there are at least brief periods when the people, while continuously exploited, is not oppressed, in the monarchies, oppression is constant. The democratic regime also lifts the masses up gradually to participation in public life—something the monarchy never does.

Yet, for Bakunin, while a parliamentary system was an important reform that benefited the popular classes, it still did not create a means to remove the basic inequalities of power and wealth in society:

Nevertheless, while we prefer the republic, we must recognise and proclaim that whatever the form of government may be, so long as human society continues to be divided into different classes as a result of the hereditary inequality of occupations, of wealth, of education, and of rights, there will always be a class-restricted government and the inevitable exploitation of the majorities by the minorities. The State is nothing but this domination and this exploitation, well regulated and systematised.<sup>55</sup>

The establishment of a parliamentary government did not change the basic class character of the state: it was as much a form of "class-rule" as "absolute monarchy."<sup>56</sup> Laws created by the state were, in general, not a means providing equal rights and protection for all but served the interests of those who thrived on inequality and oppression; all "legislation made within the state," Kropotkin insisted, "has to be repudiated because it has always been made with regard to the interests of the privileged classes."<sup>57</sup> Only laws forced on to the state *from without*, by the direct action of the popular classes, could benefit the masses. Even these laws were compromises that restrained the ruling class yet did not overthrow it. The field of law must then be understood as shaped

55 Bakunin, 'Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,' 144.

56 Kropotkin, 'Anarchist Communism,' 52.

57 Kropotkin, 'Modern Science and Anarchism,' 165.

by class struggles, yet dominated by the ruling class, and unable to provide the means of popular emancipation.

In the classical Marxist tradition, the state is defined in fairly simple terms as a “body of armed men” serving the dominant class, from which it can be concluded that the working class, led by the revolutionary party, must form its own dictatorship of the proletariat to change society.<sup>58</sup> This state would later wither away, but it was a necessary intermediate stage between capitalism and the free communism of the future. For the anarchists, this strategy failed to take account of the fact that the state was not simply a “body of armed men” but also and always a highly centralised structure that inevitably concentrated power in the hands of a directing elite. “It would be obviously impossible for some hundreds of thousands or even some tens of thousands or indeed for only a few thousand men to exercise this power.”<sup>59</sup> A strong state could have “only one solid foundation: military and bureaucratic centralisation.”<sup>60</sup>

If that was the case, then even the most radical government must perpetuate the rule of a (class) minority over a (class) majority. One effect was a crippling of popular self-activity and self-organisation, with the state “a vast slaughterhouse or enormous cemetery, where all the real aspirations, all the living forces of a country enter generously and happily,” but are “slain and buried.”<sup>61</sup> A “centralised government” concentrated power in “parliament and its executive,” and was also unable to deal with the concerns of ordinary people, “all the numberless affairs of the community.”<sup>62</sup>

If “state... and capitalism are inseparable concepts... bound together... by the bond of cause and effect, effect and cause,” then even a revolutionary state must generate a capitalist system of some sort.<sup>63</sup> Just as an economically dominant class entails a state, a state entails

58 V. I. Lenin, ‘The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution’ in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, ed. V. I. Lenin (1917; repr., Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975).

59 Bakunin, ‘Letter to *La Liberté*,’ 281. See also Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 330.

60 Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 337.

61 M. Bakunin, ‘The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1871; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 269.

62 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 50.

63 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism,’ 181.

It was precisely because capitalism tended to produce more than could be sold, argued Kropotkin, that ruling groups clashed in search of sources of raw materials and new markets:

What Germany, France, Russia, England and Austria are struggling for at this moment, is not military supremacy but economic supremacy, the right to impose their manufactures, their custom duties, upon their neighbours; the right to develop the resources of peoples backward in industry; the privilege of making railways through countries that have none, and under that pretext to get demand of their markets, the right, in a word, to filch every now and then from a neighbour a seaport that would stimulate their trade or a province that would absorb the surplus of their production...

The opening of new markets, the forcing of products, good and bad, upon the foreigner, is the principle underlying all the politics of the present day throughout our continent, and the real cause of the wars of the nineteenth century.<sup>127</sup>

Later anarchists held similar views. Rocker claimed that it was “meaningless to speak of a community of national interests, for that which the ruling class of every country has up to now defended as national interest has never been anything but the special interest of privileged minorities in society secured by the exploitation and political suppression of the great masses.” For behind nationalist ideas, wrote Rocker, are “hidden... the selfish interests of power-loving politicians and money-loving businessmen for whom the nation is a convenient cover to hide their personal greed and their schemes for political power.”<sup>128</sup>

Grigori Petrovitch “G. P.” Maximoff (1893-1950) contended that “so-called national interests... are in fact the interests of the ruling classes” for whom the right “to independent sovereign existence, is nothing but the right of the national bourgeoisie to the unlimited exploitation of its proletariat.” Furthermore, the new national states “in their turn begin to deny national rights to their own subordinate minorities, to persecute their languages, their desires and their right to be themselves,” and in “this manner

127 Ibid.

128 R. Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture* (1937; repr., Cornucopia, WI: Michael E. Coughlin, 1978), 269, 253.

the new state itself. Bakunin illustrated this with a striking discussion that remains relevant. In Serbia, which had broken free of Turkey, there were “no nobles, no big landowners, no industrialists and no very wealthy merchants” at independence; a “new bureaucratic aristocracy,” drawn from the educated young patriots, soon emerged as the ruling class in the new state. The “iron logic” of their position transformed them into “cynical bureaucratic martinets” who became “enemies of the people,” a ruling class.<sup>123</sup> This is a point that would seem to be confirmed by the experience of many postcolonial countries, where the leading cadres of the independence movements used state power and developed into new ruling classes—often proving as repressive as their colonial forebears.

The rhetoric of independence, freedom, and national unity would become a cover for the activities of the new rulers, and a cudgel to beat the working class, the peasantry, and the poor. Bakunin observed that “the bourgeoisie love their country only because, for them, the country, represented by the State, safeguards their economic, political and social privileges... Patriots of the State, they become furious enemies of the mass of the people.” Thus, for Bakunin, national liberation without social revolutionary goals would simply be an elite transition, transferring power from a foreign to a local ruling class.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, newly independent states would continually re-create the problem of conquest and national oppression: “to exist, a state must become an invader of other states... it must be ready to occupy a foreign country and hold millions of people in subjection.”<sup>125</sup> For Bakunin, the state system would continually generate war, to which Kropotkin added the point that wars were also waged in the economic interests of ruling classes: “men fight no longer for the good pleasure of kings; they fight to guarantee the incomes and augment the possessions of their Financial Highnesses, Messrs. Rothschild, Schneider and Co., and to fatten the lords of the money market and the factory.”<sup>126</sup>

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123 Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 343.

124 Ibid.

125 Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 343, 339.

126 P. Kropotkin, *War!* (London: William Reeves, 1914), available at <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/AnarchisCArchives/kropotkin/War!Iwar!1.html> (accessed April 1, 2000).

an economically dominant class. State centralisation was not accidental but rather followed from the role of the state as an instrument of the dominant minorities—of ruling classes—which could only rule if administrative power was concentrated in their hands. The State was both a defender of the class system, and itself a central pillar of ruling class power.

The emancipation of the working class and peasantry required a radically democratic form of social organisation that maximised popular self-activity and self-management—and this was entirely at odds with the state. The state, argued Kropotkin, “having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy those privileges.”<sup>64</sup> This critique of the state as both a ruling-class organisation and the destroyer of individual freedom is quite different from the rejection of the state as an enemy of individual autonomy—the view, again, held by Godwin, Stirner, and Tolstoy.

## The Rejection of State Socialism

The political conclusion that followed was that the state was as much an obstacle to the abolition of the class system as landlordism and capitalism. While opposed to economic liberalism, the anarchists did not look to increased state intervention as a solution. The choice between the market and the state was an empty one. The state was not, and could not become, an instrument of fundamental social change. Regardless of their ideology, intent, or social origins, those who held state power would always be part of a dominant class. Bakunin commented that “the people will feel no better if the stick with which they are being beaten is labelled the ‘people’s stick’... No State... not even the reddest republic—can ever give the people what they really want.”<sup>65</sup>

A strategy premised on the capture of state power—whether by electoral action or revolution—would, in other words, simply repeat the social evils present in the existing states: class domination through authoritarian centralisation. It is in this context that Bakunin described universal suffrage as an “immense fraud” and a “puerile fiction,” at least with regard to the distribution of power and wealth in society: “The day after election

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64 Ibid., 170.

65 Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 338.

everybody goes about his business, the people go back to toil anew, the bourgeoisie to reaping profits and political conniving.”<sup>66</sup> When decision making occurs without the “intervention” of the people, the “people are committed to ruinous policies, all without noticing.” The results of the election of a new government, even one openly committed to advancing the interests of the majority, would be “very moderate,” and the ruling party would become part of the machinery of class domination, adopting patriotism in place of internationalism, forming alliances with “bourgeois liberal” parties, and restricting its aspirations to minimal reforms that do not upset the ruling class.<sup>67</sup>

Instead of the ruling party changing the state, the state would change the ruling party. Bakunin argued that parliamentarians would be corrupted by their “institutional positions” and unaccountable to their constituencies, and it is a “characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the hearts and minds of men.”<sup>68</sup> This would apply regardless of the mandates given to the party, the wages paid to the parliamentarians, or the existence of other mechanisms to keep the parliamentarians accountable to their constituents. Paying parliamentarians a worker’s wage or making provision for constituents to recall “bad” parliamentarians between elections would not change the situation.

When Bakunin wrote, widespread suffrage was a rarity everywhere, including in Europe. By Kropotkin’s time there had been real changes, yet the situation still seemed to bear out Bakunin’s views. “Much hope of improvement,” remarked Kropotkin, “was placed... in the extension of political rights to the working classes,” but “these concessions, unsupported by corresponding changes in economic relations, proved delusions.”<sup>69</sup>

The anarchists also rejected the classical Marxist strategy of the proletarian dictatorship as a means to destroy class society. The use of the state, a centralised instrument of power, would mean a small revolutionary elite would operate as a ruling group, replicating an

66 M. Bakunin, ‘Representative Government and Universal Suffrage,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1870; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 220-22.

67 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 194, 213-17.

68 Bakunin, ‘God and the State,’ 228.

69 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 49.

political and social equality of both sexes.” The “children of both sexes must, from birth, be provided with equal means and opportunities for their full development, i.e. support, upbringing and education,” for “next to social and economic equality” this measure was critical for creating “greater and increasing natural freedom for individuals, and [would] result in the abolition of artificial and imposed inequalities.”<sup>118</sup>

Bakunin also declared “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression,” stating that every people “has the right to be itself... no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its languages and its laws.”<sup>119</sup> He doubted whether “imperialist Europe” could keep the subject peoples in bondage: “Two-thirds of humanity, 800 million Asiatics asleep in their servitude will necessarily awaken and begin to move.” Decolonisation was perfectly acceptable: “The right of freely uniting and separating is the first and most important of all political rights.”<sup>120</sup> Given his commitment to class struggle and socialism, however, he asked, “In what direction and to what end” would and should such struggles evolve?<sup>121</sup> For Bakunin, national liberation had to be achieved “as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses.” If the national liberation struggle is carried out with “ambitious intent to set up a powerful State,” or if “it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class,” it will become a “retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement.” He believed that “every exclusively political revolution — be it in defence of national independence or for internal change... — that does not aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of people will be a false revolution. Its objectives will be unattainable and its consequences reactionary.”<sup>122</sup>

Bakunin maintained that the “statist path involving the establishment of separate... States” was “entirely ruinous for the great masses of the people” because it did not abolish class power but simply changed the nationality of the ruling class. Where local capitalists and landlords were weak at independence, a new ruling elite could quickly coalesce through

118 Bakunin, ‘Preamble and Programme of the International Alliance of the Socialist Democracy,’ 427.

119 Bakunin, quoted in Guérin, *Anarchism*, 68.

120 Quoted in Eltzbacher, *Anarchism*, 81.

121 Bakunin, quoted in Guérin, *Anarchism*, 68.

122 Bakunin, ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,’ 99.

rupture of this solidarity and a permanent cause of war”?<sup>114</sup> Anarchists, however, go beyond simply making abstract calls for an end to prejudice and hatred; as we shall see in chapter 10, the broad anarchist tradition generally believed that the struggle for popular unity *also* required a struggle against institutionalised discrimination and oppression on the basis of race and nationality.

This follows from the anarchist commitment to freedom and equality, and is also expressed in the broad anarchist movement’s feminist impulse. There were certainly anarchists and syndicalists who paid only lip service to women’s emancipation, and the early movement often failed to challenge the sexual division of labour that confined women to particular occupations and roles. In principle, however, the anarchists wanted to unite men and women in the class struggle, and championed equal rights for women as well as measures to improve women’s position in society. Bakunin’s stance on women was “far ahead of that of most of his contemporaries.”<sup>115</sup> He noted that the law subjected women to men’s “absolute domination,” women were not given the same opportunities as men, and the “poor underprivileged woman” suffered most. Given his class politics, though, Bakunin believed that working-class and peasant women’s interests were “indissolubly tied to the common cause of all exploited workers-men and women”—and were quite different from those of the ruling classes, the “parasites of both sexes.”<sup>116</sup>

It was through the revolution that the final “emancipation of all” would be achieved: women would no longer be economically dependent on men, as their basic needs would be provided by society, and they would therefore be “free to forge their own way of life.” The abolition of the state along with the creation of social and economic equality would see the “authoritarian juridical family” disappear, to be replaced by free and consensual relationships and the “full sexual freedom of women.”<sup>117</sup> The Alliance’s programme stressed that it sought “above all” the “economic,

114 Bakunin, ‘Internationalism and the State,’ 43.

115 M. Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 33.

116 M. Bakunin, ‘Manifesto of the Russian Revolutionary Association to the Oppressed Women of Russia on Women’s Liberation,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (Montreal: Black Rose, 1980), 396–98.

117 Ibid.

important feature of the class system that anarchists wished to destroy: rule by minority. Further, freedom could not be introduced from above but required self-emancipation through cooperation and struggle. “I am above all an absolute enemy of revolution by decrees,” said Bakunin, “which derives from the idea of the revolutionary State, i.e., reaction disguised as revolution.” Why “reaction disguised as revolution”? Simply because authoritarian means could not be used to promote emancipatory ends: “decrees, like authority in general, abolish nothing; they only perpetuate that which they were supposed to destroy.”<sup>70</sup>

Even if a revolutionary dictatorship crushed the older elites, the new regime would itself be a class system, fundamentally as bad as any that preceded it. For “the proletariat,” Bakunin wrote, “this will, in reality, be nothing but a barracks: a regime, where regimented workingmen and women will sleep, wake, work, and live to the beat of a drum.”<sup>71</sup> For Kropotkin, such a state would be “as great a danger to liberty as any form of autocracy” because government would be “entrusted with the management of all the social organisation including the production and distribution of wealth.”<sup>72</sup>

Bakunin and Kropotkin repeatedly suggested that revolutionary “socialist” governments would, in fact, be forms of state capitalism. Bakunin spoke of the opportunities for the “shrewd and educated,” who would “be granted government privileges,” and the “mercenary-minded,” who would be “attracted by the immensity of the international speculations of the state bank, [and] will find a vast field for lucrative, underhanded dealings.”<sup>73</sup> “The State, having become the sole proprietor” of the means of production, “will then become the only banker, capitalist, organiser, and director of all national labour, and the distributor of its products.”<sup>74</sup> The spectre of “centralised state-capitalism,” “preached under the name of collectivism,” a “form of the wage system,” always haunted Kropotkin’s writings.<sup>75</sup>

70 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 193–94.

71 Bakunin, ‘Letter to *La Liberté*,’ 284.

72 Kropotkin, ‘Anarchist Communism,’ 50.

73 Bakunin, ‘Letter to *La Liberté*,’ 284.

74 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 217.

75 Kropotkin, ‘Modern Science and Anarchism,’ 170, 186.

Slavery within would be matched by slavery without, as the revolutionary state competed with other states, forcing the new ruling elite to become patriots, warmongers, and aspiring imperialists; thus, a Marxist regime in Germany would become the bearer of a new pan-Germanism, and Marx would become the “Bismarck of socialism.” After a twentieth century that has seen the invasion and military occupation of Eastern Europe by the USSR, border clashes between the USSR and the People’s Republic of China (which led to more troops being deployed by the USSR along the Chinese border than the border with Western Europe by the 1970s), and war between the self-described socialist regimes of Cambodia and Vietnam, many would say that Bakunin was right.

For anarchists, the repression, social inequalities, and militarism of the self-described regimes of “actually existing socialism” and “people’s democracies” of the twentieth century are not temporary “distortions” or a “degeneration” of an otherwise-emancipatory Marxist practice. They are the logical outcomes of an authoritarian and statist politics. The means shape the ends; an authoritarian strategy, based on centralisation, dictatorship, and militarisation, necessarily leads to a centralised, dictatorial, and militarised regime. A self-managed and popular revolution from below, on the contrary, has the real potential to create a new and radically democratic society. The need for the means to match the ends, and the possibility of a radical anticapitalist politics that rejects the state, are two of anarchism’s major insights for contemporary struggles.

## Elements of the Social Revolution

How, then, did these anarchists propose to change society? They did not always agree on the best strategy—an issue that we will explore in later chapters. Consequently, strategy cannot be a defining feature of anarchism. What anarchists did share, however, were a set of principles to frame strategy and tactics: class struggle, internationalism, self-determination, antistatism, and antiauthoritarianism.

## The Popular Classes

As is clear from the preceding discussion, anarchists saw the struggle of the popular classes—the working class and peasantry—as the basic motor of change. It would be futile to expect the ruling class to act against its own vested interests in the current system. Even when

his own, he made a principle of popular unity across the lines of race and nationality: “What do we mean by respect for humanity” but “the recognition of human right and human dignity in every man, of whatever race” or “colour”?<sup>110</sup> “Convinced that the real and definitive solution of the social problem can be achieved only on the basis of the universal solidarity of the workers of all lands; the Alliance rejects all policies based upon the so-called patriotism and rivalry of nations.”<sup>111</sup>

Despite an occasional tendency to stereotype the Germans and praise the Slavs (understandable perhaps given his commitment to the decolonisation of Eastern Europe), Bakunin hoped for a situation where “the German, American and English toilers and those of other nations” would “march with the same energy towards the destruction of all political power.”<sup>112</sup> He had “no doubt that the time will come when the German proletariat itself” would renounce statist politics and join the international labour movement, “which liberates each and everyone from his statist fatherland.”<sup>113</sup> In his view, despite the differences between the German kaiser, the Russian czar, or the French emperor, all were fundamentally united in their determination to maintain the class system.

This is one of the great insights of the broad anarchist tradition: if the ruling classes practice international solidarity with one another on fundamental issues, so should the popular classes. This is a remarkably early statement of the idea of “globalisation from below” to change the world.

For Bakunin and Kropotkin, it was the state system that artificially inflamed national hatreds and rivalries, and consequently, “the necessarily revolutionary policy of the proletariat must have for its immediate and only object the destruction of states.” How could anyone “speak of international solidarity when they want to keep states—unless they are dreaming of the universal state, that is to say... universal slavery like the great emperors and popes—the state by its nature being a very

110 Bakunin, ‘Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,’ 147.

111 M. Bakunin, ‘Preamble and Programme of the International Alliance of the Socialist Democracy,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1868; repr., Montreal: Black Rose, 1980), 427–28.

112 Bakunin, ‘Letter to *La Liberté*,’ 281.

113 M. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (1873; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 51.

cannot be confined to one country; isolated struggles can no more succeed in one country than they can in one trade.

As Bakunin asserted: “The question of the revolution... can be solved only on the grounds of internationality.”<sup>104</sup> It was necessary to forge the most powerful “ties of economic solidarity and fraternal sentiment” between the “workers in all occupations in all lands.”<sup>105</sup> He saw in international bodies such as the First International the nucleus of an international movement and the basis of a new international order. Such a body could eventually “erect upon the ruins of the old world the free federation of workers’ associations,” “the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world.”<sup>106</sup> Again and again, Bakunin argued for a “serious international organisation of workers’ associations of all lands capable of replacing this departing world of *states*.”<sup>107</sup>

Bakunin believed that there “exists only one law which is really obligatory for all members, individuals, sections and federations of the International,” and that was “the international solidarity of the toilers in all trades and in all countries in their economic struggle against the exploiters of labour.” He continued: “It is in the real organisation of this solidarity, by the spontaneous organisation of the working masses and by the absolutely free federation, powerful in proportion as it will be free, of the working masses of all languages and nations, and not in their unification by decrees and under the rod of any government whatever, that there resides the real and living unity of the International.”<sup>108</sup>

Such “real and living unity” required unity between skilled and less skilled workers as well as the unity of the popular classes around the world. For Bakunin, the division between the urban working class and the peasantry was the “fatal antagonism” that has “paralysed the revolutionary forces” — a problem that any serious revolutionary project had to defeat.<sup>109</sup> While Bakunin was by no means free of prejudices of

104 Ibid., 147.

105 M. Bakunin, ‘The Programme of the Alliance,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1871; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 249, 252; see also 253–54.

106 Ibid., 255.

107 Bakunin, ‘The Policy of the International,’ 174.

108 M. Bakunin, ‘Internationalism and the State.’ in *Marxism, Freedom, and the State*, ed. K. J. Kenafick (London: Freedom Press, 1990), 43.

109 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 192.

ruling classes were oppressed by other ruling classes and powerful states, their interests lay in expanding their own scope for exploitation and domination. A class struggle from below, assuming a radically democratic form and taking place outside of and against the state, and aiming to replace capitalism and the state with collective ownership of the means of production, collective and participatory decision-making, and an international, federal, and self-managed socialist system is at the heart of anarchism.

Bakunin emphasised that “the only two classes capable of so mighty an insurrection” as was required to remake society are “*the workers and the peasants*.”<sup>76</sup> It was essential that ordinary people, working class and peasant alike, organise as a bloc of oppressed classes independently of their class enemies. Bakunin and Kropotkin had immense faith in the “flower of the proletariat,” the great “rabble of the people,” the “underdogs,” the “great, beloved, common people,” the masses.<sup>77</sup> It was in the “great mass of workers... unable to obtain a better station in life” that the “will” and “power” needed to make the revolution was to be found.<sup>78</sup> The enormous growth of the working class in modern times, the continued existence of the peasantry, and the increasing class divisions of the present Signal that the historical agents identified by Bakunin and Kropotkin remain a force with which to reckon.

Anarchism’s stress on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry differentiated it from the views of the early Marxists. Marx and Engels predicted the demise of the peasantry, and argued that the peasantry were inherently unable to organise, for their “mode of production isolates them from one another, instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse”; they “do not form a class” capable of “enforcing their class interests in their own name.”<sup>79</sup> This supposedly predisposes peasants to seek salvation from above by an “unlimited governmental power” that

76 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 185, 189.

77 Bakunin, ‘The International and Karl Marx,’ 294–95.

78 M. Bakunin, ‘The Policy of the international,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (1869; repr., London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), 166–67.

79 Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848; repr.; Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954), 22; K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852; repr., Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 110–11.

“sends them rain and sunshine from above.”<sup>80</sup> The agrarian question had to be resolved as a secondary part of the “proletarian” revolution, and it could not be resolved without the leading role of the working class.

The appropriate agrarian strategy was fiercely debated among classical Marxists, and the SDP was deeply divided on the issue of the peasantry. While some activists were keenly interested in winning the peasantry, the party majority followed Kautsky’s view that the peasantry constituted a declining class and was relatively unimportant to the party’s fortunes, and that the party should not adopt a programme of reforms aimed at the peasantry.<sup>81</sup> Kautsky, the “pope of socialism,” did “more to popularise Marxism in western Europe than any other intellectual” besides Engels.<sup>82</sup>

Kautsky’s views on the agrarian question were designed for industrial Germany, and he believed that a different approach was needed for less developed countries like Russia where capitalism was not yet dominant. Here, the task of the day was a bourgeois democratic revolution: the capitalist class must take power, uproot feudal barriers to trade and industry, and undertake agrarian and legal reforms. The peasantry could aid this process, although they would be destroyed by the subsequent development of capitalism.<sup>83</sup> Capitalism, in turn, was a necessary step towards socialism.

Lenin agreed with Kautsky, arguing that as a “bourgeois revolution expresses the needs of capitalist development,” it was “*in the highest degree advantageous to the proletariat.*”<sup>84</sup> Operating in backward Russia, where urban industry was an island in a vast peasant sea, the Bolsheviks naturally looked to the peasants for allies, but proposed that the peasants take their lead from the working class, itself led by the vanguard party.<sup>85</sup> In the thought of Mao, the leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the peasantry were regarded as critical to

80 Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 110–11.

81 G. P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854–1938: Marxism in the Classical Years* (2nd ed., Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 102–11.

82 J. Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966), 91; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, 3.

83 Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, 135–36.

84 V. I. Lenin, ‘Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution,’ in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, ed. V. I. Lenin (1905; repr., Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 451–52..

85 See, for example, *ibid.*, 480–83

But let me tell you that this act of unselfish and fraternal solidarity is also an act of foresight and prudence... big capital [will]... overrun your industry... And so you, or at least your children, will be as slavish and poor as workers in large industrial establishments now.<sup>102</sup>

For Bakunin, the basic logic of the capitalist system was not to create secure layers of privileged workers but rather to pit the “slavish and poor” against those who were more “free and fortunate,” inevitably undermining the conditions of the latter. It is understandable, from this perspective, why Bakunin always regarded the relatively privileged workers as only a small layer, a “little working class minority,” and clear that he believed them incapable of single-handedly defending their conditions against the onslaught of the ruling class. Bakunin’s position was at odds with the view, held by many modern-day nationalists, that capitalism and the state could co-opt large sectors of the working class; the “aristocracy of labour” were a besieged minority, and Bakunin believed that only through the broadest possible class unity could the interests of the popular classes as a *whole* be defended and advanced.

The notion of a “labour aristocracy” has generally not been important to anarchism, which has tended to argue that the interests of the popular classes are essentially the same worldwide. It was through the “association” of the workers in “all trades and in all countries” that the vision of “full emancipation” becomes possible.<sup>103</sup>

## Internationalism, Social Equality and Anti-imperialism

Anarchism is an internationalist movement. Just as the working class and peasantry were international, and just as capitalism and landlordism existed internationally, it is necessary to wage and coordinate struggles across national boundaries. The state was a tool of the wealthy and powerful, not a voice of a people or nation, and therefore the struggle should not be confined to state borders; the basic interests of the popular classes were essentially alike everywhere, and thus the struggle

102 Bakunin, ‘Three Lectures to Swiss Members of the International,’ 61–62.

103 M. Bakunin, ‘Geneva’s Double Strike,’ in *Mikhail Bakunin: From out of the Dustbin: Bakunin’s Basic Writings, 1869–1871*, ed. R. M. Cutler (1869; repr., Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1985), 148.

There is no basis for such claims. Bookchin's notion that Marx placed his hopes in the formation of a stable industrial working class while Bakunin "saw in this process the ruin of all hopes for a genuinely revolutionary movement" is a caricature.<sup>98</sup> Bakunin did, it is true, voice suspicions of the "upper strata" of workers in "certain better paying occupations" who had become "semi-bourgeois."<sup>99</sup> He also contrasted this "little working class minority," the "aristocracy of labour," the "semi-bourgeois" workers, with the "*flower of the proletariat*," the great "rabble of the people," the "underdogs," the "great, beloved, common people," who he believed Marx, perhaps unfairly, dismissed as a criminal lumpenproletariat.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, Bakunin stopped short of formulating any clear theory of a "labour aristocracy"—a theory of the sort that suggests that a privileged layer of workers betrays the working class as a whole. Even while speaking of an "aristocracy of labour," he stated that there were "rare and generous workers," "true socialists," in its ranks.<sup>101</sup> He actively sought to recruit skilled and well-paid workers to the anarchist movement, having a great deal of success among the watchmakers of the Jura region in Switzerland, and commended these workers for their stance:

In my last lecture I told you that you were privileged workers... you are better paid than workers in large industrial establishments, you have spare time, you are... free and fortunate... not absolutely so but by comparison... And I hasten to add that you deserve so much the more merit to have entered the International... You prove thereby that you are thinking not just of yourselves... It is with great happiness that I bear this witness.

He believed that the progress of capitalism—specifically the mechanisation of industry—would ultimately undermine the situation of all "privileged workers," and saw solidarity between the skilled and unskilled as therefore critical:

98 Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 28. See also M. Bookchin, 'Deep Ecology, Anarchosyndicalism, and the Future of Anarchist Thought,' in *Deep Ecology and Anarchism: A Polemic*, ed. G. Purchase, M. Bookchin, B. Morris, and R. Aitchley (London: Freedom Press, 1993), 49–50; Bookchin, *To Remember Spain*, 25–26, 29–33.

99 Bakunin, 'Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,' 185, 189.

100 Bakunin, 'The International and Karl Marx,' 294–295.

101 Bakunin, 'The Policy of the International,' 166–67.

the bourgeois democratic revolution against the imperialist and "feudal forces" that hampered capitalist development.<sup>86</sup> Again, however, the peasants must be "led by the working class and the Communist Party," with the latter, Mao contended, structured as an armed guerrilla formation (a "people's army") given the Chinese conditions.<sup>87</sup> In the context of colonial and semicolonial countries, the bourgeois democratic revolution was termed a *national* democratic revolution to stress its anti-imperialist character.

The two-stage approach to the revolutionary process in the less developed colonial and semicolonial countries—first, a national democratic revolution, and only later a proletarian one—was codified by the Communist International (Comintern, or sometimes called the Third International) in the late 1920s.<sup>88</sup> Yet this strategy followed from the classical Marxist view that capitalism was a necessary evil that would create the working class that could install the dictatorship of the proletariat as well as the advanced industries that made socialism viable—positions that we will discuss in more depth in the next chapter. Classical Marxists, in short, traditionally saw the peasantry as a doomed class, unable to make a revolution without outside leadership, whether by capitalists or Communists.

By contrast, the anarchists always identified the peasantry as a potentially revolutionary class and the natural ally of the working class. Bakunin admitted that peasants were frequently "egoistic and reactionary," full of "prejudices" against the revolution, often fiercely attached to private property, and quite possibly harder to organise than urban workers.<sup>89</sup> But the peasants had a history of struggle, a deep hatred of their oppressors, and a common cause with the working class. Steps must be taken to draw the peasants into the revolutionary

86 Mao Tsetung, 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,' in *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung*, ed. Editorial Committee for Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tsetung (1927; repr., Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 28, 30.

87 Mao Tsetung, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China,' in *Revolutionary Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. B. Turok (1939; repr., Johannesburg: Institute for African Alternatives, 1990), 379.

88 For Lenin's classic statement of this position, see V. I. Lenin, 'Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution.'

89 Bakunin, 'Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,' 189, 192.

movement by applying the “determined treatment of revolutionary socialism” to the “rash of measles” of reactionary sentiment.<sup>90</sup>

The peasants could be won over to the struggle for social transformation through agitation, joint organisation with the working class, and a revolutionary programme. The key was not a programme of reforms under the present system but one of radical redistribution of “state and Church lands and the holdings of the big landowners,” and the suspension of “all public and private debts.”<sup>91</sup> By the end of the twentieth century, it certainly seems clear that the classical Marxist rejection of the peasantry was flawed. Anarchists can point to the importance of the peasants in the major social upheavals of the last few centuries—including the Russian and Chinese revolutions—and the existence of radical peasant currents that have gone far beyond the narrow politics that Marxism would suggest.

Anarchists can also point to the continued significance of the peasantry, for even by the most severe calculations there are perhaps still two billion peasants and petty commodity producers, while half of the world’s population lives in regions numerically dominated by the peasantry—China, South Asia and continental Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Central America.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, in some parts of Africa and Latin America there has even been some “re-peasantisation” as industrial workers retrenched during the current economic decline and neoliberal restructuring have returned to farming.<sup>93</sup>

The peasantry and working class, then, are the anarchists’ engines of revolution—not a political party, a revolutionary vanguard party, a benevolent government, or a great leader. It was necessary, Bakunin insisted, to unite the working class and peasantry, so often divided by their cultures, ways of life, and the machinations of the powerful. There was “no real conflict of interest between these two camps.”<sup>94</sup> On the contrary, they had a common class interest in rebellion—just as

90 Ibid., 189–92, 197, 208–9.

91 Ibid., 189–92, 197, 208–9; see also Bakunin, ‘Statism and Anarchy,’ 346–50.

92 Harman, *A People’s History of the World* (London: Bookmarks, 1999), 615; H. Bernstein, ‘Farewells to the Peasantry,’ *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, no. 52 (2003): 3.

93 Bernstein, ‘Farewells to the Peasantry,’ 14, 16n10.

94 Bakunin, ‘Letters to a Frenchman on the Current Crisis,’ 191–92, 204.

landlords, capitalists, and state managers formed an alliance of the oppressors, so too should the working class and peasants form a front of the oppressed in a revolutionary struggle.

This class politics is another point of difference between the anarchists and people like Godwin, Stirner, and Tolstoy. Godwin pointed to an equitable, nonclass system, but had no model of how such a society would operate, assuming that “both production and distribution can be an entirely personal matter.” He maintained that cooperation undermined rationality, favoured “gradual” change, and rejected “the possibility of any sort of working-class organisation which might be used to spread the ideas of justice and equality.”<sup>95</sup> Both Godwin and Tolstoy were great believers in individual reason, and assumed that all rational people must necessarily come to the correct conclusions if confronted with clear arguments and supporting evidence. Thus Tolstoy wrote to both the Russian czar and prime minister, urging them to introduce radical reforms. The mutualists saw society in class terms, but did not envisage change as coming through class struggles.

Clearly, it is necessary to reject the view that anarchists did not favour class struggle, or reduce social evils to the state. It has also sometimes been claimed that Bakunin was hostile to the industrial working class, seeing students, intellectuals, criminals, and the long-term unemployed as a better revolutionary element. This claim has been made by many scholars, including the esteemed historian of anarchism, Paul Avrich, the translator of the standard edition of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*, Marshall Shatz, and E. H. Carr, biographer of Bakunin.<sup>96</sup> Activists who draw deeply on the anarchist tradition, but who see class struggle as no longer relevant, like the late radical environmentalist and libertarian socialist Murray Bookchin, have also repeated it.<sup>97</sup>

95 Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin*, 280–81, 281–82.

96 P. Avrich, ‘The Legacy of Bakunin,’ in *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, ed. S. Dolgoff (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), XX–XXI; M. Statz, introduction to *Statism and Anarchy*, M. Bakunin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), XXXIII–XXXIV.

97 Bookchin, one of the more prominent recent writers influenced by anarchism, sought to erect a new “anarchist” strategy—freed of class struggle and hostile to the organised working class—by insisting that Bakunin distrusted the working class. See Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868–1936* (New York: Harper Collins Books, 1977), 28, 304–12; M. Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936: Essays by Murray Bookchin* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1994), 25–26, 29–33.