

MARXISM, STALIN AND THE CRITIQUE OF ANARCHISM

Libertarian Socialist Organization (OSL) | April/2024

In December 2023, we came across the circulation, on "Marxist-Leninist" social networks, of an old polemic by Josef Stalin against anarchism. It's his classic text *Anarchism or Socialism?*, from 1907, which resurfaces from time to time, revisiting this historical debate.

In this text, we, the activists of the Libertarian Socialist Organization (LSO), intend to put the debate into context and revisit important issues in the history and theory of socialism. This will serve to make the anarchist positions and their differences with Marxism really known. We want to show the fragility of Stalin's critique, which can only be welcomed by people who don't know (or pretend not to know) anarchism and the history of socialism.

Our intention is not to polemicize with one or another organization in particular, but to open a frank debate with the Brazilian radical left about socialism and the paths to socialism. This discussion seems relevant to us, given the context in which we are living.

STALINISM IN AN ATTEMPT AT REHABILITATION

This time, Stalin's text was disseminated by the Rebellion Youth Union (UJR), associated with the Popular Unity (UP) and the Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR). These organizations, as is evident on their website/newspaper (*A Verdade*) and on their social networks, have been part of a recent effort in Brazil to rehabilitate Stalin and Stalinism. (See, for example: UJR, "Viva 145 Anos do Marxista-Leninista Josef Stálin"; PCR, "Josef Stálin: o pai dos povos")

Among other things, this rehabilitation involves defending Stalin as Lenin's most legitimate follower, and Stalinism as the true continuator of Leninism. This position was defended, for example, by Elena Ódena - a Spanish revolutionary and founder of the Communist Party of Spain (Marxist-Leninist) - in a text also published in *The Truth* and reproduced by the organizations mentioned. In it, Ódena points out that Stalin was the "most faithful and brilliant pupil of the immortal Lenin", and that all his critics are, to a greater or lesser extent,

partisan conspirators of bourgeois reaction and imperialism. She says of Stalin's text:

In his work *Anarchism or Socialism?*, written in 1907, Stalin masterfully demonstrates, in the light of historical materialism, the inconsistency of anarchism, exposing with great precision and rigor the theory of class struggle and the Marxist principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat. (Ódena, "Stalin's Decisive Theoretical and Practical Contribution to Marxism-Leninism")

Currently in Brazil, many who claim to be "Marxist-Leninists" are actually Stalinists who have engaged in this rehabilitation effort. Unfortunately, this effort has had a certain impact, especially among radicalized youth.

Trying to rehabilitate Stalin and Stalinism is not only dangerous, but also harmful to the class struggle in Brazil. This is because they strengthen authoritarianism and the bureaucratization of popular struggles and movements.

THE MARXIST CRITIQUE OF ANARCHISM AND STALIN'S TEXT

There is no doubt that most Marxist criticism of anarchism is based on common sense or on what Karl Marx or some Marxist has written about anarchism. It's a critique that often completely ignores anarchists and the history of anarchism and therefore has little (sometimes no) materiality or relationship to reality. (See the balance of Marxist criticism of anarchism in: Corrêa, *Black Flag: Rediscussing Anarchism*)

Thus situated, Stalin's text can even be considered above average, given that the author at least read some anarchists before making his critique. However, Stalin does not fail to reproduce very common features of Marxist criticism of anarchism. "Scientific", "materialist", "dialectical" and "rigorous" self-proclamations that often confuse science and theory with doctrine and ideology, replace the historical truth of what was or is with what they would like it to have been or to be, with what Marx or Marxists have said. (Malatesta, "Anarchism and Science"; Van der Walt, "Out of the Shadows: the mass base, class composition and popular influence of anarchism and syndicalism [revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalism]")

When anarchist critics accuse certain Marxists of basing themselves on "metaphysics", something that Stalin criticizes in his text, this is usually what they are talking about: authors or

militants who defend a closed system of ideas, which often has no materiality whatsoever. In other words, this anarchist accusation is a denunciation of the idealism of certain Marxists; an accusation that is obviously not directed at Marxism as a whole.

In his text, Stalin positions himself as a serious critic. He says that he doesn't want to make a "cheap criticism" and that he wants to demonstrate "the inconsistency of anarchism". Given that, for him, "the anarchists are the real enemies of Marxism", he considers it necessary to "examine the 'doctrine' of the anarchists from beginning to end and weigh it up carefully in all its aspects".

The enormous pretension of doing all this in a succinct text, in a small pamphlet, definitely does not materialize. We intend to show that Stalin's text, according to his own terms and those of Ódena, certainly doesn't examine the doctrine of the anarchists from beginning to end and, even less so, demonstrates the inconsistency of anarchism. To do that with any seriousness would require a much greater effort, studying the anarchists and the history of anarchism in depth, something that Stalin certainly didn't do.

THE EXTENSION OF MARXISM

We will begin this discussion by challenging the way Stalin establishes the currents of socialism. In his text, he points out that, in socialism, "there are different tendencies", which are subdivided "into three main currents: reformism, anarchism and Marxism". For us, this complete separation between reformism and Marxism has no support in reality, since a historical analysis of the extension of Marxism makes it clear that reformism has always been, and continues to be, a relevant part of the Marxist tradition.

To conceptualize Marxism, it is essential to take into account ideas and actions, theory and practice, as well as the broad popular movement from which it emerged and on which it had a decisive influence. These are the same criteria, for example, that we use to conceptualize anarchism. (OSL, "Our Principles and General Strategy") This means that, when defining the extent of Marxism, we are obliged to take into account the writings of Marx and Marxists, as well as their political and historical practice, both individual and collective. There is no doubt that what Marxists have written has a certain relevance, but the experiences they have built and led are unavoidable.

Understood in this way, Marxism is definitely not a homogeneous and monolithic doctrine. It is undoubtedly possible to identify some of its fundamental and defining features, as well as its most and least relevant currents and expressions. (Van der Walt,

"Counterpower, Participatory Democracy and Revolutionary Defense: debating *Black Flame*, revolutionary anarchism and historical Marxism") However, there are undoubtedly considerable differences between the authors and Marxist experiences. Anyone who seriously studies Marx, Marxists and the history of Marxism knows this. This is also true of anarchism, although Marxists (as well as liberals) often insist on pointing out "incoherence" only in anarchist positions.

Anyone who knows a little about this subject knows that there are considerable differences between the young Marx and the mature Marx (e.g. the question of social classes), between certain questions of the mature Marx and the work of Friedrich Engels (e.g. the Engelsian dialectic of nature), between certain theoretical positions of Marx and certain practices that he adopted in reality (e.g. the difference between the revolutionary defense of the Paris Commune and the positions adopted in the "First International", almost always in favor of reformist social democracy). He also knows that there are considerable differences between social democracy, Leninism, Trotskyism, Stalinism, Maoism and so on.

Even though Stalin wrote his text in 1907, and in that context most of these Marxist currents didn't exist, certain divergences were in place and were already quite evident. Not recognizing this is intellectual dishonesty. This is exactly what Stalin does when he paints in his text a fully revolutionary Marx, defender of armed mass revolution and the Paris Commune as a revolutionary model; or when, in his definition of socialist currents, he completely separates Marx and Engels from reformism, and social democracy from Marxism.

It is impossible to read Marx and Engels, to know their history and not identify their strategic ambiguities. It is true that it is possible to find a Marx and Engels more aligned with the perspective defended by Stalin, which was expressed in the revolutionary (and authoritarian) traditions of Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, etc. The founding of the "Third International" (Communist International) had exactly this significance, a break with social democratic reformism and the deviations of the "Second International" (Socialist International).

However, it is also not difficult to find a reformist, social-democratic Marx and Engels. When we analyze, for example, the conduct of Marx and those around him in the "First International" (International Workers' Association, IWA), supported by some of their writings, as well as the projects they encouraged, the forces they allied with, the vows they made, all this leaves little doubt that the

(Berthier, *Marxism and Anarchism; Social Democracy and Anarchism in the International Workers' Association, 1864-1877*).

In the AIT, the great debate between its major currents (federalist and centralist) was around the role of the state in socialist strategy. Mikhail Bakunin was the main representative of the federalists and Marx of the centralists. Among other topics, this debate included the usefulness of parliamentary disputes and the need to defend the democratic republic (Berthier, *Marxism and Anarchism*; Silva, *Strikes and Insurgent Struggles: the history of the AIT and the origins of revolutionary syndicalism*) Bakunin, for example, criticized "the Social Democrats of Germany", who were supported by Marx and Engels, for preaching "as the immediate objective of their association, legal agitation for the prior conquest of political rights". And he concluded: by making the workers central to the electoral contest, the Social Democrats "tied the proletariat to the bourgeoisie". (Bakunin, "Written Against Marx")

There were many situations that justified criticism of this kind. Engels, for example, in criticizing the anarchist uprising in Spain in 1873, which aimed to promote a social revolution through armed insurrection, demonstrates his reformism and etapism, which would later be taken up by Stalin and Stalinism. Engels argued that since "Spain is a very backward country industrially", it would not be possible to "speak of an immediate and complete emancipation of the working class". So that country would have to go through "previous stages of development", which consisted of defending the "Republic", which would be achieved with the "active political [electoral] intervention of the working class". (Engels, "The Bakuninists in Action")

These positions, present in the Marxist field in general, were decisive in the formation of the historical organizations of social democracy, as well as important leaders of the "Second International", such as Eduard Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, Paul Lafargue, Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel and many others. (Przeworski, "Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon")

Although there have been revolutionary sectors in Marxism from the beginning, they only became truly relevant with the strengthening of Bolshevism at the beginning of the 20th century, and in particular after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the creation of the "Third International". (Berthier, *Marxism and Anarchism*) In that context, it is curious that social democrats accused Lenin and the Bolsheviks of associating themselves "with the tradition of Bakunin" and thereby promoting "a real deviation from the Marxist tradition". (Corrêa, *Freedom or Death: The Theory and Practice of Mikhail Bakunin*)

MARXISM AND STATISM: THEORY AND STRATEGY

In *The German Ideology* and *The Manifesto*, Marx and Engels support an understanding of the state (bourgeois or capitalist) as a political form through which an economically dominant class (the bourgeoisie) guarantees its private ownership of the means of production and its class interests linked to the exploitation of labor. In these texts, the state administers the interests of the capitalist class because it is under the influence or direct control of its members. This thesis is relativized by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, when he recognizes the relative autonomy of the state: in certain cases, the bourgeoisie may not have direct control of the state, but insofar as it maintains the *status quo*, it ends up benefiting the bourgeoisie. (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*; *The German Ideology*; Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

Marx understands that, in capitalist society, the state is an element of the superstructure, in a certain sense subordinate to the economic and productive base (infrastructure), which is responsible for the formation of social classes and the structural conflict between them. So much so that, with the end of private ownership of *the* means of production, the classes cease to exist and the state disappears - a thesis widely disseminated by Engels, which was incorporated by Stalin into his text. (Marx, "Preface" to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; Engels, *From Utopian Socialism to Scientific Socialism*; *Anti-Dühring*)

From this understanding, the fundamental strategic lines of Marxism were established: 1.) Constitution of the proletariat (class) into a party; 2.) The conquest of political power by this class-party. These lines have been established since the *Manifesto* and have continued over the years, even after the Paris Commune. (See, for example: Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*; Marx, "Speech of 08/09/1872") Although libertarian Marxists disagree, almost all of the Marxist tradition has understood political power as the state, and the party as an instrument of political organization.

In other words, the conquest of the state was seen by the vast majority of Marxists as a central element of their strategy for socialism. Because of these ambiguities, what changed was the way in which each current understood these guidelines. For social democrats, they implied building socialist political parties and winning positions in the state through elections and legal action. For the Bolsheviks, they implied building revolutionary communist parties and conquering the state through violent revolution. (Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*)

In any case, it would be this conquest of the state by the proletariat that would make it possible to develop a lever capable of contributing to the expropriation of the landlords, the socialization of private property and the defence of the workers' revolution. This would pave the way for the end of private property, classes and the state itself. In short, it would be the emancipation of the workers. In Stalin's own terms:

The last stage of the state's existence will be the period of the socialist revolution, when the proletariat will conquer State Power and create its own government (dictatorship) for the definitive destruction of the bourgeoisie. But when the bourgeoisie is destroyed, when the classes are destroyed, when socialism is consolidated, no political power will be needed, and the so-called state will be relegated to the realms of history. (Stalin, *Anarchism or Socialism?*)

Looking at these arguments, we can say that, in theoretical terms, there seems to be no doubt that Marxism is critical of the (capitalist, bourgeois) state, even predicting its disappearance. However, in strategic terms, there is also no doubt that (orthodox) Marxism defends the seizure of the state as an essential path to socialism. It is in this sense that we affirm the close link between Marxism and statism. Even if we recognize the existence, albeit in a very small minority, of a strategically anti-statist (heterodox) Marxism. (Price, *The Abolition of the State: Anarchist and Marxist Perspectives*)

ANARCHISM AND ANTISTATISM: THEORY

In *Statism and Anarchy*, in the "Three Lectures" and in other texts from the anarchist period, Bakunin develops a theory of the state that has similarities and differences with the positions of Marx, Engels and the Marxists. Similarly, Bakunin also understands that, in modern society, the state is a political instrument of class domination that guarantees the exploitation of labor. He also maintains that, in certain circumstances (for example, in France in 1851 and Germany in 1871), even under capitalism, the bourgeoisie does not have direct control of the state. But by maintaining order, the state directly contributes to the continuity of bourgeois exploitation. In other words, Bakunin agreed with the theses of the class state and the relative autonomy of the state. (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy: The Struggle of the Two Parties in the International Workingmen's Association*; "Three Lectures to the Workers of the Saint Imier Valley")

From this point on, the differences become very significant. For Bakunin, the way Marx and Marxists conceptualize the relationship between the capitalist economy and the modern state is wrong. He accuses Marx of maintaining that "the political state of every country [...] is always the product and faithful expression of its economic situation"; and that "to change the former, it is enough to transform the latter". And of not taking "into account any other element of history, such as the reaction, which is nevertheless evident, of political, legal and religious institutions on the economic situation". (Bakunin, "Letter to the Brussels newspaper *La Liberté*") It would be a certain economic determinism, which appears quite clearly in Stalin's text.

Bakunin, Malatesta and other anarchists consider that the structure of capitalism is made up of a relationship of influence and mutual dependence between economics and politics, the capitalist economy and the modern state - two elements that, for them, are inseparable, and which are added to a third, linked to cultural, intellectual and moral legitimization. It is this structure that produces social classes, which, for anarchists, are not exclusively economically based.

When we restrict ourselves to the relationship between economics and politics, we can say that it is true that the capitalist economic structure (ownership/monopoly of the means of production and exchange) produces the bourgeoisie as the dominant class and the proletariat as the oppressed class. But class formation is more complex than that. Because the capitalist political structure, i.e. the modern state, also produces another ruling class: the bureaucracy, due to its ownership/monopoly of the means of government and repression, which separates the rulers from the ruled.

So, for anarchists, both the exploitation of labor and physical coercion and political-bureaucratic domination are inseparable and systemically associated forms of capitalist-statist domination. They contribute directly to structuring society. Class domination therefore involves a set of dominant classes, including the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, produced by this relationship between capitalism and the state. Both can be more or less aligned; they have interests in common, but also interests of their own which, on certain occasions, come into conflict. (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*; "Russia"; Malatesta, *Anarchy*; Corrêa, *Liberty or Death*; "Malatestian Contributions to Social Theory")

ANARCHISM AND ANTISTATISM: STRATEGY

From this understanding, the fundamental strategic lines of anarchism were established: 1.) Mobilization of the oppressed classes (the proletariat, the peasantry and the marginalized); 2.) Destruction of the capitalist-statist system and construction of federalist and self-managing (libertarian) socialism, both led by the oppressed classes. Lines that were forged since the "First International" and defended by anarchist classics of different currents, such as Bakunin, Piotr Kropotkin, Malatesta, Luigi Galleani, Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker and others. (Corrêa, *Black Flag*; Van der Walt, "World Revolution: for a balance of impacts, popular organization, struggles and anarchist and syndicalist theory around the world")

In other words, in anarchism, the socialization of ownership of the means of government and repression (or "destruction of the state") has always been a matter of principle, along with economic socialization (ownership of the means of production and exchange) and the socialization of knowledge (ownership of the means of communication and instruction).

This is why we understand socialism as general socialization, which breaks with the foundations of capitalism, the state and its legitimizing institutions, and which is based on a society in which workers, through their institutions (councils, unions, communes, movements, etc.), self-organize and take their destiny into their own hands. (OSL, "Our Principles and General Strategy")

The central anarchist argument is that the seizure of the state, by peaceful elections or violent revolt, can even lead to a political revolution, but never to a social revolution. It may even replace the ruling classes in power, but it never puts an end to class domination/exploitation and never moves towards socialism. (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*; Kropotkin, "The Modern State"; Malatesta, *Anarchy*)

Bakunin, for example, from the late 1860s and early 1870s, said that if the Marxist strategy succeeded, if the socialists seized state power and completely nationalized property - as predicted, for example, in the *Manifesto* - the following would happen. Among the ruling classes, the bourgeoisie would be replaced by the bureaucracy; the new leaders of the state would become a new bureaucracy, which would continue to dominate and exploit the workers for its own benefit. Among the oppressed classes, there would be few changes; new masters would continue to exploit, rule, repress and protect them (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*).

recreated, now, to use Kropotkin's concept, in the form of a "state capitalism", with the exclusive domination of the bureaucracy. (Kropotkin, "Anarchism")

In 1872, this was Bakunin's prediction, when he critically discussed the position of the Marxists:

There will therefore no longer be any class, but a government, and, mark my words, an excessively complicated government, which will not content itself with governing and administering the masses politically, as all governments do today, but which will also administer them economically, concentrating in its hands production and the fair distribution of wealth, the cultivation of the land, the establishment and development of factories, the organization and direction of commerce, in short, the application of capital to production by the sole banker, the state. All of this will require an immense amount of science and many overflowing heads in this government. It will be the reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, the most despotic, the most arrogant and the most despicable of all regimes. There will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real and fictitious doctors, and the world will be divided into a minority dominating in the name of science, and an immense ignorant majority. (Bakunin, "Written Against Marx")

But if the state is taken over by an entire class (the proletariat), how does this constitute this "new class", the bureaucracy? Anarchists have always understood that the state is a political instrument that promotes the rule of a minority over the majority. It is therefore not possible for one class to seize state power. This always happens through a few representatives, who can be chosen by a wider collectivity or who simply call themselves representatives. In the state, these representatives structurally tend to move further and further away from their origins and progressively defend their own interests: the maintenance and increase of their power and wealth. (Berthier, *Power, the Working Class and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*)

When workers occupy the state, they become bureaucrats, a governing minority:

This [ruling] minority, however, say the Marxists, will be made up of workers. Yes, of course, former workers, but who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people, will cease to be workers and will observe the proletarian world from above the state; they will no longer represent the people, but themselves and their pretensions to rule them. (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*)

To avoid this process of bureaucratization of capitalism and achieve socialism, it would be necessary for the socialization of private property to take place alongside the socialization of political power.

And this "leap" in Marxist theory which, from one moment to the next, makes socialization mean nationalization, without any critical reflection on the matter, could not be believed. With or without intention, the state resembles society... However, to socialize means to place under the control and administration of the workers themselves; to nationalize means to place under the control and administration of the state and the bureaucracy. (Vasco, *Anarchist Conception of Trade Unionism*)

Only generalized socialization leads to the end of social classes and the emancipation of workers. There is no end to private property and capitalism without the end of the state, and vice versa. For anarchists, defending the conquest of the state in order to promote socialism is practically the same thing as wanting some workers to become bosses in order to put an end to capitalism.

Finally, in theoretical terms there is no doubt that anarchism is critical of the state. But it's not just the capitalist or bourgeois state, but the state in general. The state is inseparable from capitalism, which is why the conquest of the state will never lead to socialism. It is in this sense that we affirm the inseparable link between anarchism and anti-statism. Even so, it's important to emphasize that one should never define anarchism as anti-statism - something that many "historians" of anarchism have done, quite mistakenly. This is because, as we've already said, anarchism is also socialist, anti-capitalist. (Price, *The Abolition of the State: Anarchist and Marxist Perspectives*)

THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM

Marxism and anarchism are doctrines or ideologies (in the anarchist sense, as a set of thoughts and actions) produced by the oppressed classes in struggle. In other words, we radically disagree with statements that place Marxism as "the doctrine of the proletariat" or, in Stalin's terms, "the theory of socialism". Marxism is just as much a "doctrine of the proletariat" and a "theory of socialism" as anarchism. They are two paths that workers have collectively and historically produced to defend their interests and achieve socialism. We also radically disagree with Stalin, when he says in his text that anarchism is not truly socialist and revolutionary, because, in historical terms, this statement has no materiality.

We recognize that anarchism had fewer opportunities to put its project to the test. Despite having been very strong (especially through revolutionary syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism) between the 1870s and 1920s, and having been very prominent in advanced episodes of struggle, anarchism played a leading role in only four revolutions: Mexico (1910-1913), Ukraine/Russia (1917-1921), Manchuria (1929-1932) and Spain (1936-1939). (Van der Walt, "World Revolution") In all these cases, it failed to make considerable progress or guarantee the lasting existence of an emancipatory project. At another time, we can discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these processes, and put forward our criticisms and self-criticisms of them.

In contrast, the revolutions led by Marxists achieved more "victories" throughout the 20th century. For this reason, Marxism ended up having more opportunities to put its project to the test. However, this statement in no way means that we agree with those who exalt Marxism because of these "victorious revolutions", to the detriment of anarchism, which "never won a revolution".

The 20th century made it clear that, from a popular point of view - that of the oppressed classes, the workers - the Marxist revolutions were not victorious. It was the bureaucracy linked to the communist parties that won in Russia, China, Cuba, etc. In these countries, there has never been socialism (generalized socialization of economic property and political power) or even a consistent path to socialism. (Van der Walt, "Counterpower, Participatory Democracy and Revolutionary Defense"; "Detailed Response to 'International Socialism'")

When we talk about the road to socialism, it is essential to discuss the strategic question, that is, the means that will be used to achieve socialist ends. Anarchists have always affirmed, in agreement with the greatest theoreticians of war, that objectives must subordinate strategy, and strategy must subordinate tactics. Thus, the realization of tactics must point to the realization of strategy and the latter to the achievement of objectives. In other words, the means must be consistent with the ends. (Malatesta, "The Ends and the Means"; "Socialism and Anarchy"; FARJ, *Social Anarchism and Organization*)

If anarchists criticized historical Marxism, it wasn't because they defended an all-or-nothing approach, a finalist goal without strategic and tactical mediations. Even the historically majority current of anarchism, mass anarchism, has always defended the struggle for reforms within certain programmatic frameworks, as a path to revolutionary struggle. (Silva, *Hobsbawm's Ineffective Revolutionaries: critical reflections on his approach to anarchism*)

The anarchist critique of Marxism came about (and continues to do so) because the statist means of Marxism do not lead to socialist ends, but to reformism or bureaucratism. It's not a question, as Stalin puts it, of moving from a minimum program to a maximum program, but of believing, as he does in his text, that the defense of the "democratic republic" will somehow lead to "socialism". This is the same thing as someone wanting to leave São Paulo for Pará and take the road to Rio Grande do Sul, believing that at some point they will reach their intended destination.

Generally speaking, the Marxist "socialism" of the 20th century, which was instituted in a revolutionary manner, can be characterized as a set of processes that resulted from political revolutions and promoted changes in the ruling classes of different countries. As predicted by anarchists, these processes ended up suppressing their national bourgeoisies and transferring economic and political power to state bureaucracies. Bureaucracies which, according to a consistent materialist or realist analysis, even if they claimed to be "the proletariat", "the workers", never ceased to be privileged bureaucracies, responsible for the continued domination of proletarians and peasants. (Van der Walt, "Detailed Response to 'International Socialism'"; Tragtenberg, *Reflections on Socialism*; Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*)

The experience of the Marxist revolutionary states of the 20th century, it must be said, tragically corroborated the anarchist and syndicalist [revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalist] predictions. In practice, regardless of the intentions or emancipatory aims of classical Marxism, these policies provided the basic *rationale* for the one-party dictatorships of the former Soviet bloc. (Van der Walt, "World Revolution")

Of course, this doesn't mean that we don't recognize possibilities and advances in these experiences. Of course they existed and, in some cases, they still have an impact today. This has been (and continues to be) recognized by many anarchists. Several of them even took part in these experiments, and/or gave their more or less critical support to them.

Now, the central, indisputable issue is that the so-called socialist revolutions of the 20th century were political revolutions, not social revolutions; they implied the replacement of ruling classes, but never the end of classes and socialism, in the sense put forward earlier, of the generalized socialization of economic property and political power. So, from our point of view, there has never been, to this day - apart from certain episodes, more or less

a victorious, successful experience of a socialist revolution in the world. Although we have a lot to learn from countless more and less revolutionary experiences of struggle, all the revolutions to date must be seen for what they really are: projects that went wrong, struggles in which the emancipatory project of the workers was defeated.

Socialism in the 21st century is a project in the making. The critical analysis of past experiences is important, but it is definitely not enough. In this analysis we need to bear in mind that, apart from not being models that can be imported into other realities, the statist revolutions of the last century have little to say about popular emancipation and socialism.

The big question is to discuss what the socialism of the 21st century will be and what is the best way (means) to achieve it (ends). It is essential to discuss whether this socialism will be built from the bottom up, by the base, by the workers themselves, or whether it will be instituted from the top down, by the top, by the state and party bureaucracy; whether it will be libertarian, self-managing, democratic or whether it will be domineering, authoritarian.

For us, there is no other path to socialism than this libertarian path; of a self-managing, democratic socialism that is built by the grassroots, from the people's movements in struggle. (OSL, "Our Principles and General Strategy")

DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT: THEORY AND HISTORY

We stated earlier that the strategy of conquering the state is not a path to socialism. This brings us to the subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which Stalin defends in his text. First of all, it's good to make it clear that in discussing this topic there are important issues involving the revolutionary process, the expropriation of the ruling classes, the defense of the revolution, the power of the oppressed classes, etc. These are issues that we can discuss in more depth on another occasion.

For now, we are interested in moving forward in this debate on the dictatorship of the proletariat in Marxism. But how did this theme emerge and spread among Marxists? In Marx, this is not a central concept and appears only a few times, generally with the meaning of "power of the proletariat", which Marx went so far as to say would be the triumph of democracy. Engels uses the term dubiously. In the same year, 1891, for example, he defines the dictatorship of the proletariat as the Paris Commune ("Introduction" to the *French Civil War*), in the passage quoted by Stalin, and as a parliamentary democratic republic ("Critique of the Erfurt Program"),

text that Stalin didn't read or omitted. It was only with Lenin and Marxism-Leninism that this notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat was deepened and given strategic centrality. (Berthier, *Power, the Working Class and the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"*)

From then on, Stalin's interpretation gained a lot of ground in Marxism (although not only through his writings). For him, "the socialist revolution must begin with the dictatorship of the proletariat", in other words, "the dictatorship of the entire proletarian class over the bourgeoisie". This dictatorship would be the fundamental means of expropriating the bourgeoisie, defending the revolution and guaranteeing the construction of a "socialist society". In this society, Stalin continues, "there will be no classes of any kind [...] and therefore no exploitation". In it, "there will only be workers who will produce collectively" and who "will collectively own all the land and all the subsoil, all the forests, all the factories and workshops, all the railroads, etc."

As Luigi Fabbri has rightly pointed out, this notion of a class dictatorship, especially of the proletariat or workers, makes no sense at all:

The word "dictatorship" [...] in all ancient and modern languages has always indicated a form of absolute government, which centralizes in the hands of one or a few people all the powers of the state, military, political and social. [...] A collective dictatorship, of the majority, more or less elective, of an entire class, popular, etc., as today we speak of a "dictatorship of the proletariat", would be a contradiction in terms, since the characteristic of every dictatorship consists of power accumulated [centralized] in one or a few people and not dismembered [socialized] in a collectivity. [...] The characteristic of dictatorship is power in a few hands. (Fabbri, *Dictatorship and Revolution*)

Fabbri's definition of dictatorship is precise and correct. The Stalin of 1907 could even deny it or prevaricate, saying that there are "two types of dictatorship", those of minorities and those of majorities(?), but the Marxist "socialism" of the 20th century and, in particular, the Stalin and Stalinism of the 1930s, definitely confirm it. That's why anarchists didn't "confuse these two dictatorships", as Stalin says in his text, precisely because one of them doesn't exist. What there was in the Marxist revolutionary experiments in "socialism", including the USSR, was undoubtedly a "minority dictatorship", in Stalin's own terms. A dictatorship that never included the aspects he himself defended in his text: "so-called political freedom, that is, freedom of speech, of the press, of strikes and of association, in a word, the freedom of the class struggle".

As we have already pointed out, analyzing these Marxist experiences of socialism, like any problem of history, requires a consistent materialist perspective, which does not reproduce or get carried away by legitimizing discourses, and which critically examines the facts. In making this realistic analysis, there is no other conclusion than that this equation between class and party, proletariat and communism, which is made by orthodox Marxism in general, and which Stalin reproduces in his text, has no support in reality. It is nothing more than a crude attempt at self-legitimization, promoted by a discourse without any materiality.

Just as the state bureaucracy is not the proletariat, the dictatorship in Marxist "socialism" is not of the proletariat, but of the bureaucracy. There is no way for the workers to occupy the state and no way for them to promote a collective dictatorship. In the socialist revolutions spearheaded by Marxism, there were never workers in power or a class dictatorship. What there was was always the dictatorship of a very narrow sector of the workers (if not the petty bourgeoisie) over the proletariat (and the peasantry). That's why we talk about a dictatorship "of the proletariat", with these quotation marks. In fact, it is symptomatic that Marxism has appropriated the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" to the detriment of others, such as "workers' democracy", "workers' power", etc. (Van der Walt, "Detailed Response to 'International Socialism'"; Tragtenberg, *Reflections on Socialism*; Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*; Berthier, *Power, the Working Class and "Dictatorship of the Proletariat"*).

DICTIONARSHIP "OF THE PROLETARIAT" AND MARXIST "SOCIALISM"

It is remarkable that, in his text, Stalin presented this anarchist critique of the dictatorship of the "proletariat" with a certain fidelity. He claims that anarchists are wrong when they accuse Marxists of "wanting to implement not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but their own dictatorship over the proletariat". Stalin was run over by history which, a few years later, would make it clear that this was exactly the case in the experiments of Marxist "socialism" and in the USSR.

The fundamental aspects of this anarchist critique, discussed below, have undoubtedly been confirmed by history: A bureaucratic dictatorship, even if it proclaims itself to be "of the proletariat", tends to remain in power and does not advance towards popular emancipation, socialism, communism. This dictatorship promotes the continuity of the domination/exploitation of the workers (proletariat, peasantry, etc.) and only restructures, continues class society. In other words, the domination and exploitation of workers is not a strategically coherent path to their own emancipation. In our view, this

emancipation can only be achieved by emancipatory means: the self-managed and federalist organization (grassroots democracy) of the workers.

The bureaucratic dictatorship is one of the most important features of the revolutionary experiences of "20th century Marxism", which ended up "becoming an ideology that would sustain successive dictatorships". When we analyse "the history of Marxism in a third of the world once ruled by Marxist regimes", we see without much difficulty that the conception of "a centralized dictatorship headed by a vanguard party as the agent of the revolution" was responsible for the "one-party dictatorships established in Russia, China and other countries". (Van der Walt, "World Revolution")

These facts once again confirm Bakunin's prediction, made more than 40 years before the Russian Revolution:

According to them [the Marxists], this statist yoke, this dictatorship, is a necessary transitional phase in order to arrive at the total emancipation of the people: the goal being anarchy or freedom, and the means being the state or dictatorship. Therefore, in order to liberate the masses of the people, we must first subjugate them. For the moment, our polemic has stopped at this contradiction. The Marxists maintain that only dictatorship, obviously theirs, can create the freedom of the people; to this we reply that no dictatorship can have any other objective than to last as long as possible and that it is only capable of engendering slavery in the people who suffer it and educating the latter in this slavery; freedom can only be created by freedom, that is, by the insurrection of the whole people and by the free organization of the working masses from the bottom up. (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*)

This position, which had already been expressed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was repeated by countless anarchists since Bakunin, as in the case of those who participated in the Ukrainian developments of the Russian Revolution, and who were betrayed and/or eliminated by the Bolsheviks. In 1926, Nestor Makhno, Piotr Arshinov, Ida Mett and others, in the "Organizational Platform", reaffirmed that the regime of the "'dictatorship of the proletariat' established by the Bolsheviks in Russia" was based on the conviction that "this regime should only be a transitional step towards total communism". However, it ended up leading to "the restoration of class society, with the workers and poor peasants remaining, as before, at the bottom". (Dielo Truda, "The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists")

At another time we can discuss the continuities and discontinuities that exist in statist socialism from Marx to Stalin, passing through Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao etc. Even so, there seems to be no doubt that the aforementioned confusion/replacement of class

with/by the party spreads theoretically and deepens practically with the aforementioned revolutions of the 20th century. And this contributes decisively in different countries to capitalist bureaucratization taking the place of the socialist project.

The Russian Revolution is a typical example. A revolutionary process that at its beginning had liberating perspectives and broad participation by the masses, with the soviets/councils as its main reference point, soon degenerated and became bureaucratized. The Bolsheviks' rise to power progressively implied this degenerate bureaucratization of the revolution, which soon ended up establishing and sustaining "state capitalism". "In Russia, the revolution was buried by dictatorship", which implied "the bloody subjugation of the non-possessing classes", the "banishment of all genuine socialists and revolutionaries" and the "total lack of rights for the working class". (Rocker, *The Soviets Betrayed by the Bolsheviks*)

Even Marxist historians have shown how, throughout the revolutionary process, the party was replaced by its central committee, and finally, under Stalin, the central committee was replaced by the figure of its great leader. (See, for example: Broué, *Communists Against Stalin; Soviet Union: from revolution to collapse*; Marie, *Stalin*) But, when analyzing anarchist participation and libertarian studies on the 1917 Revolution, it becomes clear that this process didn't just happen under Stalin. It began much earlier, as soon as the Bolsheviks took power away from the soviets/councils, established their dictatorship over proletarians and peasants, and repressed the left-wing socialist and revolutionary opposition.

Books by classic anarchists - such as Emma Goldman's *My Disillusionment in Russia* and Rudolf Rocker's *The Soviets Betrayed by the Bolsheviks* - and more recent libertarian studies - such as *The Russian Revolution* (M. Tragtenberg), *The Russian Anarchists, the Soviets and the 1917 Revolution* (A. Skirda), *Marxism and Anarchism in the Russian Revolution* (A. Lehnberg). Tragtenberg), *The Russian Anarchists, the Soviets and the 1917 Revolution* (A. Skirda), *Marxism and Anarchism in the Russian Revolution* (A. Lehning), *A Hundred Years of the Russian Revolution: from the free soviets to the restoration of privilege* (F. Mintz) - are very useful in this respect. They prove, with abundant information and sources, that anarchist criticism is well-founded and historically supported. They also allow anarchist participation and positions in that context to be properly known.

In short, not only the Russian Revolution, but all the experiences of Marxist "socialism" throughout the 20th century demonstrate, as anarchists maintain, that the formula of the dictatorship "of the proletariat" defended by Stalin in his text does not lead to socialism, to popular emancipation. The anarchists mentioned in Stalin's text are correct: the "dictatorship of the proletariat" really is "the death of the revolution".

STALIN'S OTHER MISTAKES ABOUT ANARCHISM

Finally, there are other errors by Stalin about anarchism that are worth mentioning. On the relationship between the individual and society, he maintains that "the cornerstone of anarchism is the individual, whose liberation is, in his view, the main condition for the liberation of the masses, of the collectivity". This position is opposed by various anarchist classics. Rocker, for example, recognized the determining influence that society exerts on the individual:

Man is above all a social creation in which the whole species works slowly but without interruption, and from which it always draws new energy, celebrating its resurrection every second. Man is not the discoverer of social coexistence, but its heir. He received the social instinct from his animal ancestors crossing the threshold of humanity. Without society, man is inconceivable." (Rocker, "Anarchism and Organization")

And Bakunin, criticizing Rousseau's individualist conception of freedom, stated that individual freedom is only possible in collective freedom; he defended the "freedom of each for the freedom of all" and also that "freedom is only possible in equality". For Bakunin, "the freedom of individuals is absolutely not an individual fact, it is a fact, a collective product. No man could be free outside and without the participation of the whole of human society." (Bakunin, "Three Lectures...")

In addition, Stalin confuses Marxism with historical-dialectical materialism, presenting both as practically synonymous. This confusion is very common among Marxists and involves the very notion of "scientific socialism", so widespread among Engels. As Malatesta rightly pointed out, one thing is the interpretation of social reality, another is the judgment of that reality and the intervention that is made on it with a view to achieving a certain goal. Of course, the two are linked, and you can only make an appropriate intervention in reality if you understand it properly. But they are not the same thing." (Malatesta, "Anarchism and Science")

Among Marxists, the adjective "scientific" for their socialism served/serves mainly as a legitimizing discourse. Like any ideology or doctrine (including anarchism), Marxism is not restricted to a method, a scientific and/or philosophical perspective for understanding reality. No one can deny that Marxism is scientific in its analysis of reality. And we believe that, in fact, science must be used critically by socialists to this end.

But in Marxism (anarchism, etc.) there are also principles, ethical foundations, value conceptions and aspirations for the world that are not scientific; they go beyond science and are central to supporting judgments of reality, the setting of objectives and methods of action. Socialists cannot expect science to provide the answers to all of this. (FAU, "Huerta Grande") In other words, Stalin is wrong when he considers in his text that "proletarian socialism" derives (almost) automatically from "dialectical materialism".

When Stalin cites Kropotkin's criticism of Hegel as evidence of an anti-dialectical character of anarchism, he ignores the fact that, among anarchists, there has always been a certain theoretical and philosophical plurality, just as among Marxists. In both socialist currents there is no monolithic and unanimous theoretical and philosophical body; what does exist are broad internal debates on such issues. Only the most dogmatic sectors maintain that, whether in anarchism or Marxism, there are straight and deeply homogeneous theoretical and philosophical lines, and that any disagreements with them should be considered "revisionist".

We won't discuss the validity of Hegelian philosophy here. We'll just say that, while it's true that Kropotkin didn't consider Hegel to be relevant because he was too abstract and idealistic, other anarchists made important contributions. Let's remember, for example, that in his youth Bakunin was the greatest Hegelian in Russia, and played a much greater role in the Hegelian left than Marx and Engels. (Del Giudice, *The Young Bakunin and Left Hegelianism*)

In his text, Stalin also briefly recalls Proudhon - indirectly, through Marx's critical eye - and criticizes certain metaphysical aspects of his political thought. He takes up Marx's criticism of Proudhon and, without further explanation, involves the liberal Spencer in the discussion, placing them both as the foundations of anarchism. In relation to this, three comments can be made.

Firstly, the richness of Proudhon's political thought is definitely not covered in Marx's critique (*Misery of Philosophy*). In order to get to know Proudhonian thought, it is necessary to study his writings or seek out qualified commentators, such as Jean Bancal, Georges Gurvitch, Pierre Ansart and René Berthier; on the *Philosophy of Misery vs. Misery of Philosophy* debate, it is worth reading José C. Morel's "Introduction" to the publication of Proudhon's book by Ícone. Secondly, although Proudhon can be considered the father of anarchism, the appropriation of his ideas by later anarchists was critical and partial. The aspect of his socialism that had the greatest impact on anarchism was federalism. Let's remember that even Bakunin, who recognized himself as a disciple of Proudhon, stated that "in the implacable criticism that

[Marx made to Proudhon] there is undoubtedly a lot of truth in it." (Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*)

Thirdly, Kropotkin, who was possibly the anarchist who discussed Spencer the most, did so in a very critical way, and never took the position of being a follower of his ideas. Kropotkin looked to Spencer (as well as Darwin and others) for foundations in the natural sciences that could counter metaphysical philosophy and, together with history and sociology, support a rigorous understanding of material reality. Kropotkin identifies several problems in Spencer, including his methodological approach, his approach to native peoples and, especially, his shallow and pessimistic view of Darwin, which was expressed in a distorted social Darwinism. According to Kropotkin, "Spencer's synthetic philosophy, although it undoubtedly represents an enormous advance" in relation to metaphysical and religious approaches, "still contains in its sociological part errors as gross" as in other of his works. (Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*)

Still on Kropotkin, Stalin writes in his text that "Kropotkin's doctrine [...] encloses future socialism within the confines of isolated towns and communes". And this "contradicts the interests of a powerful expansion of production", which is being carried out in the "capitalist order". We still want to know where Stalin read this in Kropotkin, because it seems like information that only he had access to... Federalism, for Kropotkin and for anarchists in general, seeks to avoid both centralism and autonomism, and accounts for the developments of modern society. (Berthier, *On Federalism*; Dolgoff, *The Relevance of Anarchism to Modern Society*)

FINALLY, SOME ELEMENTS FOR THE DEBATE

In conclusion, we can start by saying that the words Stalin used against anarchists serve him very well. His text on anarchism is "the result of misunderstanding or is unworthy malediction". Apparently, he and those who reproduce it "are afflicted with an ailment: they are very fond of 'criticizing' the parties of their opponents, but they don't bother to get to know anything about those parties".

Stalin's reading and understanding of anarchism is undoubtedly very inadequate; his text, as far as anarchism is concerned, has little materiality. It's clear that he didn't deliver what he promised: he didn't rigorously examine anarchism, let alone demonstrate its inconsistency. However, Stalin's text is not just a

critical discussion of anarchism. It also sets out to present the theoretical and strategic foundations of revolutionary Marxism.

Throughout our text, we have tried to show what brings us closer to and what distances us from this so-called "Leninist" approach to Marxism. We have tried to expose the relationship between Marxism, on the one hand, and reformism, on the other: the relationship between Marxism, on the one hand, and reformism and revolutionary bureaucratism, on the other; the insufficiency of the Marxist theory of the state and social classes, which leads to misunderstandings of analysis and, consequently, of the strategy of socialist transformation; that the conquest of the state never leads to the socialization of the means of life (of production and exchange, of government and repression, of communication and education) and, in the way it was promoted by revolutionary Marxism in the 20th century, always leads to bureaucratic dictatorship and the continued domination of workers; that many of Marxism's strategic hypotheses for promoting socialism and communism have been rejected by history.

This doesn't mean that we don't recognize theoretical and practical qualities in Marxism and in many Marxists. They certainly exist. Our argument is that the paths taken by Marxism in the last century, whether through the reformist path of social democracy or the revolutionary path of Leninism, are insufficient and mistaken for the construction of an emancipated society. For us, it is a mistake to bet on the orthodox paths of Marxism; but to try to rehabilitate the legacy of Stalin and Stalinism is complete nonsense.

In other words, we believe that building a socialist project for this early 21st century requires other references. And, modestly, we believe that the conceptions and history of anarchism (including anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism) still have a lot to say in this regard.

We need a different project for socialism and a suitable way to build it. A 21st century socialism must be capable of promoting widespread socialization, affecting the economic, political and intellectual-moral fields. It needs to be able: to promote self-managed popular power, the effective power of the workers; to replace domination at all levels with self-management, authoritarian social relations with liberating ones. It also needs to be in profound agreement with the principles of social ecology. In other words, this socialism has to be libertarian/anti-authoritarian, self-managing/federalist (democratic) and ecological.

The paths to this socialism need to guarantee their strategic coherence, so that the means of struggle and organization must necessarily point towards this socialist society. In our view, this involves (re)organizing the

workers in popular movements (trade unions, community movements, agrarian movements, etc.) and guarantee these movements certain strategic and programmatic characteristics, which include: classist and combative perspective of struggle; independence from the ruling classes and capitalist-statist institutions and various forms of direct action against them; mechanisms of grassroots democracy which, through self-management and federalism, avoid bureaucratization and produce a new political culture and new revolutionary subjects; conditions for breaking with fragmentation and forming a broad revolutionary movement, capable of increasingly raising the level of the class struggle, until a social revolution is possible and creates the possibilities for this socialism to be implemented.

These positions are more detailed in another document, entitled "Our Principles and General Strategy", which can be accessed on our website: www.socialismolibertario.net.