Anarchists

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Bolshevism and the Anarchists

The libertarian tradition of communism — anarchism — has been bitterly hostile to the marxist ever since Bakunin, or for that matter Proudhon. Marxism, and even more leninism, have been equally hostile to anarchism as theory and programme and contemptuous of it as a political movement. Yet if we investigate the history of the international communist movement in the period of the Russian revolution and the Communist International, we find a curious asymmetry. While the leading spokesmen of anarchism maintained their hostility to bolshevism with, at best, a momentary wavering during the actual revolution, or at the moment when the news of October reached them, the attitude of the bolsheviks, in and outside Russia, was for a time considerably more benevolent to the anarchists. This is the subject of the present paper.

The theoretical attitude with which bolshevism approached anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements after 1917, was quite clear. Marx, Engels and Lenin had all written on the subject, and in general there seemed to be no ambiguity or mutual inconsistency about their views, which may be summarized as follows:

a. There is no difference between the ultimate objects of marxists and anarchists, i.e. a libertarian communism in which exploitation, classes and the state will have ceased to exist.

b. Marxists believe that this ultimate stage will be separated from the overthrow of bourgeois power through proletarian revolution, by a more or less protracted interval characterized by the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and other transitional arrangements, in which state power would play some part. There was room for some argument about the precise meaning of the classical marxist writings on these problems of transition, but no ambiguity at all about the marxist view that the proletarian revolution would not give rise immediately to communism, and that the state could not be abolished, but would 'wither away'. On this point the conflict with anarchist doctrine was total and clearly defined.

c. In addition to the characteristic readiness of marxists to see the power of a revolutionary state used for revolutionary purposes, marxism was actively committed to a firm belief in the superiority of centralization to decentralization or federalism and (especially in the leninist version), to a belief in the indispensability of leadership, organization and discipline and the inadequacy of any movement based on mere 'spontaneity'.

d. Where participation in the formal processes of politics was possible, marxists took it for granted that socialist and communist movements would engage in it as much as in any other activities which could contribute to advance the overthrow of capitalism.

e. While some marxists developed critiques of the actual or potential authoritarian and/or bureaucratic tendencies of parties based on the classical marxist tradition, none of these critics abandoned their characteristic lack of sympathy for anarchist movements, so long as they considered themselves to be marxists.

The record of the political relations between marxist movements and anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist ones, appeared equally unambiguous in 1917. In fact, these relations had been considerably more acrimonious in the lifetime of Marx, Engels and the Second International than they were to be in that of the Comintern. Marx himself had fought and criticized Proudhon and Bakunin, and the other way round. The major social democratic parties had done their best to exclude anarchists, or been obliged to do so. Unlike the First International, the Second no longer included them, at all events after the London Congress of 1896. Where marxist and anarchist movements coexisted, it was as rivals, if not as enemies. However, though the marxists were intensely exasperated by the anarchists in practice revolutionary marxists, who shared with them an increasing hostility to the reformism of the Second International, tended to regard them as revolutionaries, if misguided ones. This was in line with the theoretical view summarized in (a) above. At least anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism might be regarded as a comprehensible reaction against reformism and opportunism. Indeed, it might be — and was — argued that reformism and anarcho-syndicalism were part of the same phenomenon: without the one, the other would not have gained so much ground. It could further be argued that the collapse of reformism would also automatically weaken anarcho-syndicalism.

It is not clear how far these views of the ideologists and political leaders were shared by the rank-and-file militants and supporters of the marxist movements. We may suppose that the differences were often much less clearly felt at this level. It is a well-known fact that doctrinal, ideological and programmatic distinctions which are of major importance at one level, are of negligible importance at another- e.g. that as late as 1917 'social democratic' workers in many Russian towns were barely if at all aware of the differences between bolsheviks and mensheviks. The historian of labour movements and their doctrines forgets such facts at his peril.

This general background must be supplemented by a discussion of the differences between the situation in various parts of the world, in so far as these affected the relations between communists and anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists. No comprehensive survey can be made here, but at least three different types of countries must be distinguished:

a. Regions in which anarchism had never been of major significance in the labour movement, e.g. most of north-western Europe (except the Netherlands), and several colonial areas in which labour and socialist movements had hardly developed before 1917.

b. Regions in which anarchist influence had been significant, but diminished dramatically, and perhaps decisively, in the period 1914–36. These must include part of the Latin world, e.g. France, Italy and some Latin American countries, as also China, Japan and — for somewhat different reasons — Russia.

c. Regions in which anarchist influence remained significant, if not dominant, until the latter part of the 1930s. Spain is the most obvious case.

In regions of the first type relations with movements describing themselves as anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist were of no significance to communist movements. The existence of small numbers of anarchists, mainly artists and intellectuals, raised no political problem, and neither did the presence of anarchist political refugees, immigrant communities in which anarchism might be influential, and other phenomena marginal to the native labour movement. This appears to have been the case in, say, Britain and Germany after the 1870s and 1880s, when anarchist trends had played some part, mainly disruptive, in the special circumstances of extremely

small socialist movements or socialist movements temporarily pressed into semi-illegality as by Bismarck's anti-socialist law. The struggles between centralized and decentralized types of movement, between bureaucratic and anti-bureaucratic, 'spontaneous' and 'disciplined' movements were fought out without any special reference (except by academic writers or a few very erudite marxists) to the anarchists. This was the case in Britain in the period corresponding to that of revolutionary syndicalism on the continent. The extent to which communist parties showed themselves to be aware of anarchism as a political problem in their countries, remains to be seriously studied by a systematic analysis of their polemical publications (in so far as these did not merely echo the preoccupations of the International), of their translation and/or re-publication of classical marxist writings on anarchism, etc. However, it may be suggested with some confidence that they regarded the problem as negligible, compared to that of reformism, doctrinal schisms within the communist movement, or certain kinds of petty-bourgeois ideological trends such as, in Britain, pacifism. It was certainly entirely possible to be deeply involved in the communist movement in Germany in the early 1930s, in Britain in the later 1930s, without paying more than the most cursory or academic attention to anarchism, or indeed without ever having to discuss the subject.

The regions of the second type are in some respects the most interesting from the point of view of the present discussion. We are here dealing with countries or areas in which anarchism was an important, in some periods or sectors a dominant influence in the trade unions or the political movements of the extreme left.

The crucial historical fact here is the dramatic decline of anarchist (or anarcho-syndicalist) influence in the decade after 1914. In the belligerent countries of Europe this was a neglected aspect of the general collapse of the prewar left. This is usually presented primarily as a crisis of social democracy, and with much justification. At the same time it was also a crisis of the libertarian or anti-bureaucratic revolutionaries in two ways. First, many of them (e.g. among 'revolutionary syndicalists') joined the bulk of marxist social democrats in the rush to the patriotic banners — at least for a time. Second, those who did not, proved, on the whole, quite ineffective in their opposition to the war, and even less effective at the end of the war in their attempts to provide an alternative libertarian revolutionary movement to the bolsheviks. To cite only one decisive example. In France (as Professor Kriegel has shown), the 'Carnet B' drawn up by the Ministry of the Interior to include all those 'consideres comme dangereux pour l'ordre social', i.e. 'les revolutionnaires, les syndicalistes et les anarchistes', in fact contained mainly anarchists, or rather 'la faction des anarchistes qui milite dans le mouvement syndical'. On 1 August 1914 the Minister of the Interior, Malvy, decided to pay no attention to the Carnet B, i.e. to leave at liberty the very men who, in the government's opinion, had convincingly established their intention to oppose war by all means, and who might presumably have become the cadres of a working-class anti-war movement. In fact, few of them had made any concrete preparations for resistance or sabotage, and none any preparation likely to worry the authorities. In a word, Malvy decided that the entire body of men accepted as being the most dangerous revolutionaries, was negligible. He was, of course, quite correct.

The failure of the syndicalist and libertarian revolutionaries, further confirmed in 1918–20, contrasted dramatically with the success of the Russian bolsheviks. In fact, it sealed the fate of anarchism as a major independent force on the left outside a few exceptional countries for the next fifty years. It became hard to recall that in 1905–14 the marxist left had in most countries been on the fringe of the revolutionary movement, the main body of marxists had been

identified with a de facto non-revolutionary social democracy, while the bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classical marxism. Marxism was henceforth identified with actively revolutionary movements, and with communist parties and groups, or with social democratic parties which, like the Austrian, prided themselves on being markedly left wing. Anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism entered upon a dramatic and uninterrupted decline. In Italy the triumph of fascism accelerated it, but where, in the France of 1924, let alone of 1929 or 1934 was the anarchist movement which had been the characteristic form of the revolutionary left in 1914?

The question is not merely rhetorical. The answer is and must be: largely in the new communist or communist-led movements. In the absence of adequate research this can not yet be adequately documented, but the broad facts seem clear. Even some of the leading figures or well-known activists of the 'bolshevized' communist parties came from the former libertarian movements or from the militant trade union movements with their libertarian ambiance: thus in France Monmousseau and probably Duclos. This is all the more striking, since it was rather unlikely that leading members of marxist parties would be drawn from former anarcho-syndicalists, and even less likely that leading figures in the libertarian movement would opt for leninism.[1] It is indeed highly likely that (as the leader of the Dutch cp, De Groot observes, perhaps not without some parti pris) that ex-libertarian workers adapted themselves better to life in the new cps than ex-libertarian intellectuals or petty bourgeois. After all, at the level of the working-class militant, the doctrinal or programmatic differences which divide ideologists and political leaders so sharply, are often quite unreal, and may have little significance, unless at this level — i.e. in the worker's specific locality or trade union — different organizations or leaders have long-established patterns of rivalry.

Nothing is more likely, therefore, than that workers previously adhering to the most militant or revolutionary union in their locality or occupation should, after its disappearance shift without much difficulty into the communist union which now represented militancy or revolutionary attitudes. When old movements disappear, such a transfer is common. The old movement may retain its mass influence here and there, and the leaders and militants who have identified themselves with it, may continue to hold it together on a diminishing scale as best they can, in so far as they do not retire de jure or de facto into an unreconciled inactivity. Some of the rank and file may also drop out. But a large proportion must be expected to transfer to the most suitable alternative, if one is available. Such transfers have not been investigated seriously, so that we know no more about what happened to ex-anarcho-syndicalists (and those who had followed their lead) than we know about ex-members or followers of the Independent Labour Party in Britain after the 1930s, or ex-communists in Western Germany after 1945.

If a large part of the rank and file of the new communist parties, and more especially, the new revolutionary trade unions, was composed of former libertarians, it would be natural to expect this to have had some effect on them. On the whole there is little sign of this within the communist parties. To take merely one representative example, the discussions on 'bolshevizing the Communist International' in the Enlarged Executive of that organization, March-April 1925, which dealt specifically with the problem of non-communist influences within the communist

[1] Of a small random sample of French communist MPS between the wars, the *Dictionnaire des Parlementaires Francais 1889–1940*, gives the following indications about their pre-communist past: Socialist 5; 'Sillon', then socialist 1; trade union activity (tendency unknown) 3; libertarian 1; no pre-communist past 1.

movement. There are little more than a half-dozen references to syndicalist and none to anarchist influence in this document.[2] They are confined entirely to the cases of France, Italy and the United States. As for France, the loss 'of the larger part of the former leading officials [of social democratic origins in Germany], and of petty-bourgeois syndicalist origins in France' is noted (p. 38). Treint reported that 'our Party has eliminated all the errors of Trotskyism: all the individualist quasi-anarchist errors, the errors of the belief in legitimacy, of the coexistence of diverse factions in the Party. It has also learned to know the Luxemburgist errors' (p. 99). The ECCI resolution recommended, as one of ten points concerning the French party 'in spite of all former French traditions, establishment of a well-organized Communist Mass Party' (p. 160). As for Italy, 'the numerous and diverse origin of the deviations which have arisen in Italy' are noted, but without reference to any libertarian trends. Bordiga's similarity to 'Italian syndicalism' is mentioned, though it is not claimed that he 'identifies himself completely' with this and other analogous views. The Marxist-Syndicalist faction (Avanguardia group) is mentioned as one of the reactions against the opportunism of the Second International, as is its dissolution 'into trade syndicalism' after leaving the party (pp. 192–3). The recruitment of the CPUSAU from two sources — the Socialist Party and syndicalist organizations — is mentioned (p. 45). If we compare these scattered references to the preoccupation of the International in the same document with a variety of other ideological deviations and other problems, the relatively minor impact of libertarian-syndicalist traditions within communism, or at least within the major communist parties of the middle 1920s, is evident.

This may to some extent be an illusion, for it is clear that behind several of the tendencies which troubled the International more urgently, such traditions may be discerned. The insistence of the dangers of 'Luxemburgism' with its stress on spontaneity, its hostility to nationalism and other similar ideas, may well be aimed at the attitudes of militants formed in the libertarian-syndicalist school, as also the hostility — by this time no longer a matter of very serious concern — to electoral abstentionism. Behind 'Bordighism', we can certainly discern a preoccupation with such tendencies. In various western parties Trotskyism and other marxist deviations probably attracted communists of syndicalist origins, uncomfortable in the 'bolshevized' parties — e.g. Rosmer and Monatte. Yet it is significant that the *Cahiers du Bolchevisme* (28 November 1924), in analyzing the ideological trends within the French cp, make no allusion to syndicalism. The journal divided the party into '20 per cent ofjauresism, 10 per cent of marxism, 20 per cent of leninism, 20 per cent of Trotskyism, and 30 per cent of Confusionism'. Whatever the actual strength of ideas and attitudes derived from the old syndicalist tradition, that tradition itself had ceased to be significant, except as a component of various left-wing, sectarian or schismatic versions of marxism.

However, for obvious reasons, anarchist problems preoccupied the communist movement more in those parts of the world where before the October revolution the political labour movement had been almost entirely anarchist and social democratic movements had been negligible, or where the anarcho-syndicalists maintained their strength and influence during the 1920s; as in large regions of Latin America. It is not surprising that the Red International of Labour Unions in the 1920s was much preoccupied with these problems in Latin America, or that as late as 1935 the Communist International observed that 'the remnants of anarcho-syndicalism have not yet been completely overcome' in the cp of Brazil (whose original membership consisted overwhelmingly

[2] *Bolshevising the Communist International*, London, 1925.

of former anarchists). Nevertheless, when we consider the significance of anarcho-syndicalism in this continent, the problems arising from it seem to have caused the Comintern little real preoccupation after the Great Depression of 1929–30. Its chief criticism of the local communist parties in this respect appears to have been that they were unable to benefit sufficiently from the rapid decline of the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organizations and the growing sympathy for communism of their members.[3]

In a word, the libertarian movements were now regarded as rapidly declining forces which no longer posed major political problems.

Was this complacency entirely justified? We may suspect that the old traditions were stronger than official communist literature suggests, at any rate within the trade union movements. Thus it is fairly clear that the transfer of the Cuban tobacco workers' union from anarcho-syndicalist to communist leadership made no substantial difference either to its trade union activities or to the attitude of its members and militants.[4] A good deal of research is needed to discover how far, in former strongholds of anarcho-syndicalism the subsequent communist trade union movement showed signs of the survival of old habits and practices.

Spain was virtually the only country in which anarchism continued to be a major force in the labour movement after the Great Depression, while at the same time communism was — until the Civil War — comparatively negligible. The problem of the communist attitude to Spanish anarchism was of no international significance before the second republic, and in the period of the Popular Front and Civil War became too vast and complex for cursory treatment. I shall therefore omit discussion of it.

The fundamental attitude of the bolsheviks towards anarchists thus was that they were misguided revolutionaries, as distinct from the social democrats who were pillars of the bourgeoisie. As Zinoviev put it in 1920, in discussion with the Italians who were considerably less well disposed towards their own anarchists: 'In times of revolution Malatesta is better than d'Aragona. They do stupid things, but they're revolutionaries. We fought side by side with the syndicalists and the anarchists against Kerensky and the Mensheviks. We mobilized thousands of workers in this way. In times of revolution one needs revolutionaries. We have to approach them and form a bloc with them in revolutionary periods.'[5] This comparatively lenient attitude of the bolsheviks was probably determined by two factors: the relative insignificance of anarchists in Russia, and the visible readiness of anarchists and syndicalists after the October revolution to turn to Moscow, at all events until it was clear that the terms for union were unacceptable. It was no doubt reinforced later by the rapid decline of anarchism and syndicalism, which — outside a small

[3] 'The growth of discontent among the masses and of their resistance to the attacks of the ruling classes and of imperialism have sharpened the process of disintegration among socialist, anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist organizations. In the most recent period the recognition of the need for a united front with the communists has sunk quite deep roots among rather wide strata of their rank and file. At the same time the tendency for a direct entry into the ranks of the revolutionary unions and communist parties has grown stronger (especially in Cuba, Brazil, Paraguay). After the sixth World Congress there has been a marked drop in the specific weight of anarcho-syndicalism within the labour movements of South and Caribbean America. In some countries the best elements of the anarcho-syndicalist movement have joined the Communist Party, e.g. in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Cuba […]. In other countries the weakening of anarcho-syndicalist influence was accompanied by a strengthening of socialist and reformist organizations (Argentina), the "national-reformist parties" (Mexico, Cuba)': *Die Kommunistische Internationale vor dem 7. Weltkongress*, p. 472.

[4] I owe this point to Miss Jean Stubbs, who is preparing a doctoral thesis on the Cuban tobacco workers.

[5] P.Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, vol. 1, p. 77.

and diminishing number of countries — made it seem increasingly insignificant as a trend in the labour movement. 'I have seen and talked to few anarchists in my life', said Lenin at the Third Congress of the ci (Protokoll, Hamburg, 1921, p. 510.) Anarchism had never been more than a minor or local problem for the bolsheviks. An official ci annual for 1922–3 illustrates this attitude. The appearance of anarchist groups in 1905 is mentioned, as is the fact that they lacked all contact with the mass movement and were 'as good as annihilated' by the victory of reaction. In 1917 anarchist groups appeared in all important centres of the country, but in spite of various direct action they lacked contact with the masses in most places and hardly anywhere succeeded in taking over leadership. 'Against the bourgeois government they operated in practice as the "left", and incidentally disorganized, wing of the Bolsheviks.' Their struggle lacked independent significance. 'Individuals who came from the ranks of the anarchists, performed important services for the revolution; many anarchists joined the Russian cp.' The October revolution split them into 'sovietist', some of whom joined the bolsheviks while others remained benevolently neutral, and 'consequent' anarchists who rejected Soviet power, split into various and sometimes eccentric factions, and are insignificant. The various illegal anarchist groups active during the Kronstadt rising, have almost totally disappeared.[6] Such was the background against which the leading party of the Comintern judged the nature of the anarchist and syndicalist problem.

It need hardly be said that neither the bolsheviks nor the communist parties outside Russia were inclined to compromise their views in order to draw the libertarians towards them. Angel Pestafia, who represented the Spanish cnt at the Second Congress of the ci found himself isolated and his views rejected. The Third Congress, which discussed relations with syndicalists and anarchists at greater length, established the distance between them and the communists even more clearly, under the impact of some trends within the communist parties and what was believed to be an increase in anarchist and syndicalist influence in Italy after the occupation of the factories.[7] Lenin intervened on this point, observing that agreement with anarchists might be possible on objectives — i.e. the abolition of exploitation and classes — but not on principles — i.e. 'the dictatorship of the proletariat and the use of state power during the transitional period'.[8] Nevertheless, the increasingly sharp critique of anarcho-syndicalist views was combined with a positive attitude towards the movement especially in France. Even in the Fourth Congress the syndicalists were still, in France, contrasted to their advantage not only with the social democrats, but with ex-social democratic communists. 'We have to look for quite a lot of elements for a Communist Party in the ranks of the Syndicalists, in the ranks of the best parts of the Syndicalists. This is strange but true' (Zinoviev).[9] Not until after the Fifth Congress — i.e. during the period of 'bolshevization' does the negative critique of anarcho-syndicalism clearly begin to prevail over the positive appreciation of the movement — but by then it is so far merged with the critique of Trotskyism, Luxemburgism and other intra-communist deviations as to lose its specific political

[6] 'Jahrbuch für Wirschaft, Politik und Arbeiterbewegung' (Hamburg), 1922–3, pp. 247, 250, 481–2.

[7] *Decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International*, London, 1921, p. 10.

[8] *Protokoll*, p. 510.

[9] *Fourth Congress of the Communist International. Abridged Report.* London, 1923, p. 18.

point.[10] By this time, of course, anarchism and syndicalism were in rapid decline, outside a few special areas.

It is therefore at first sight surprising that anti-anarchist propaganda seems to have developed on a more systematic basis within the international communist movement in the middle 1930s. This period saw the publication of the pamphlet, Marx et Engels contre I'anarchisme, in France (1935), in the series 'Elements du communisme', and an obviously polemical History of Anarchism in Russia, by E. Yaroslavsky (English edition 1937). It may also be worth noting the distinctly more negative tone of the references to anarchism in Stalin's Short History of the CPSU (b) (1938),[11] compared to the account of the early 1920s, quoted above.

The most obvious reason for this revival of anti-anarchist sentiment was the situation in Spain, a country which became increasingly important in international communist strategy from 1931, and certainly from 1934. This is evident in the extended polemics of Lozovsky which are specifically aimed at the Spanish cnt.[12] However, until the Civil War the anarchist problem in Spain was considered much less urgent than the social democratic problem, especially between 1928 and the turn in Comintern policy after June-July 1934. The bulk of the references in official ci documents in this period concentrates, as might be expected, on the misdeeds of Spanish socialists. During the Civil War the situation changed, and it is evident that, for instance, Yaroslavsky's book is aimed primarily at Spain: 'The workers in those countries where they now have to choose between the doctrine of the anarchists and those of the Communists should know which of the two roads of revolution to choose.'[13]

However, perhaps another — though perhaps relatively minor — element in the revived anti-anarchist polemics should also be noted. It is evident both from the basic text which is constantly quoted and reprinted — Stalin's critique of Bukharin's alleged semi-anarchism, made in 1929 — and from other references, that anarchizing tendencies are condemned primarily because they 'repudiate the state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism' (Stalin). The classical critique of anarchism by Marx, Engels and Lenin, tends to be identified with the defence of the tendencies of state development in the Stalinist period.

To sum up:

The bolshevik hostility to anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as a theory, strategy or form of organized movement was clear and unwavering, and all 'deviations' within the communist movement in this direction were firmly rejected. For practical purposes such 'deviations' or what could be regarded as such, ceased to be of significance in and outside Russia from the early 1920s.

[10] Cf. Manuilsky. 'We think, for instance, that so-called Trotskyism has a great deal in common with individualistic Proudhonism [...] It is not by accident that Rosmer and Monatte, in their new organ directed against the Communist Party, resuscitate theoretically the ideas of the old revolutionary syndicalism, mixed with a defence of Russian Trotskyism': *The Communist International*, English edition, no. 10, new series, p. 58.

[11] 'As to the Anarchists, a group whose influence was insignificant to start with, they now definitely disintegrated into minute groups, some of which merged with criminal elements, thieves and provocateurs, the dregs of society; others became expropriators "by conviction", robbing the peasants and small townsfolk, and appropriating the premises and funds of workers' clubs; while others still openly went over to the camp of the counter-revolutionaries, and devoted themselves to feathering their own nests as menials of the bourgeoisie. They were all opposed to authority of any kind, particularly and especially to the revolutionary authority of the workers and peasants, for they knew that a revolutionary government would not allow them to rob the people and steal public property', p. 203.

[12] A. Lozovsky, *Marx and the Trade Unions*, London, 1935 (first edn. 1933), pp. 35h5 and especially pp. 146–54.

[13] Op. cit., p. 10.

The bolshevik attitude to the actual anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements was surprisingly benevolent. It was determined by three main factors:

a. the belief that the bulk of anarcho-syndicalist workers were revolutionaries, and both objective and, given the right circumstances, subjective allies of communism against social democracy, and potential communist;

b. the undoubted attraction which the October revolution exercised on many syndicalists and even anarchists in the years immediately following 1917;

c. the equally unquestioned and increasingly rapid decline of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as a mass movement in all but a very few of its old centres.

For the reasons mentioned above, the bolsheviks devoted little attention to the problem of anarchism outside the few areas in which it retained its strength (and, in so far as the local communist parties were weak, not much even within those areas) after the early 1920s. However, the rise to international significance of Spain, and perhaps also the attempt to give a theoretical legitimation to the Stalinist development of a dictatorial and terrorist state, led to a revival of anti-anarchist polemics in the period between the Great Slump and the end of the Spanish Civil War.

(1969)

The Spanish Background

The Iberian peninsula has problems but no solutions, a state of affairs which is common or even normal in the 'third world', but extremely rare in Europe. For better or worse most states on our continent have a stable and potentially permanent economic and social structure, an established line of development. The problems of almost all of Europe, serious and even fundamental though they may be, arise out of the solution of earlier ones. In western and northern Europe they arose mainly on the basis of successful capitalist development, in eastern Europe (much of which was in a situation analogous to Spain until 1945) on the basis of a soviet-type socialism. In neither case do the basic economic and social patterns look provisional, as, for instance, the patterns of national relations within and between states still so often appear to be. Belgian capitalism or Yugoslav socialism may well change, perhaps fundamentally; but both are obviously far less likely to collapse at slight provocation than the complex *ad hoc* administrative formulae for ensuring the coexistence of Flemings and Walloons, or of various mutually suspicious Balkan nationalities.

Spain is different. Capitalism has persistently failed in that country and so has social revolution, in spite of its constant imminence and occasional eruption. The problems of Spain arise out of the failures, not the successes, of the past. Its political structure is nothing if not provisional. Even Franco's regime, which has lasted longer than any other since 1808 (it has beaten the record of the Canovas era 1875–97), is patently temporary. Its future is so undetermined that even the restoration of hereditary monarchy can be seriously considered as a political prospect. Spain's problems have been obvious to every intelligent observer since the eighteenth century. A variety of solutions have been proposed and occasionally applied. The point is that all of them have failed. Spain has not by any means stood still. By its own standards the economic and social changes of the nineteenth century were substantial, and anyone who has watched the country's evolution in the past fifteen years knows how unrealistic it is to think of it as essentially the same as in 1936. (An Aragonese *pueblo* demonstrates this very clearly, if only in the increase of local tractors from two to thirty-two, of motor vehicles from three to sixty-eight, of bank branches from nought to six.) Nevertheless the fundamental economic and social problems of the country remain unresolved, and the gap between it and more developed (or more fundamentally transformed) European states remains.

Raymond Carr, whose remarkable book probably supersedes all other histories of nineteenth — and twentieth-century Spain for the time being,[1] formulates the problem as that of the failure of Spanish liberalism; that is to say of an essentially capitalist economic development, a bourgeois-parliamentary political system, and a culture and intellectual development of the familiar western kind. It might be equally well, and perhaps more profitably, formulated as that of the failure of Spanish social revolution. For if, as Carr admits, liberalism never had serious chances of success, social revolution was, perhaps for this reason, a much more serious prospect. Whatever we may

[1] Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808–1939*, Oxford, 1966.

think of the upheavals of the Napoleonic period, the 1830s (which Carr analyzes with particular brilliance), of 1854–6 or 1868–74, there can be no denying that social revolution actually broke out in 1931–6, that it did so without any significant assistance from the international situation, and that the case is practically unique in western Europe since 1848.

Yet it failed; and not only, or even primarily because of the foreign aid given to its enemies. One would not wish to underestimate the importance of Italian and German aid or Anglo-French 'non-intervention' in the Civil War, the greater single-mindedness of Axis than of Soviet support, or the remarkable military achievements of the Republic, which Carr rightly recognizes. It is quite conceivable that, given a different international configuration, the Republic could have won. But it is equally undeniable that the Civil War was a double struggle against armed counter-revolution and the gigantic, and in the last analysis fatal, internal weaknesses of revolution. Successful revolutions, from the French Jacobins to the Vietnamese, have shown a capacity to win against equally long or even longer odds. The Spanish Republic did not.

There is no great mystery about the failure of Spanish liberalism, though so much of the nineteenth-century history of the country and of its basic social and economic situation is too little known for excessively confident analysis. 'The changes in the classic agricultural structure of Spain between 1750 and 1850 were achieved by a rearrangement of the traditional economy, by its expansion in space, not by any fundamental change' (p. 29). (Carr's explanation that poverty of soil and capital resources made this inevitable, is not entirely convincing.) What it amounted to was that Spain maintained a rapidly growing population, not by industrial and agricultural revolution, but by a vast increase in the extensive cultivation of cereals, which in time exhausted the soil and turned inland Spain into an even more impoverished semi-desert than it already was. Logically, the politics of agricultural inefficiency gave way to those of peasant revolution. 'In the nineties politicians were bullied by the powerfully organized wheat interest; in the twentieth century they were alarmed by the threat of revolution on the great estates.' The alternative, intensive cash crops for export (e.g. oranges) was not generally applicable without prohibitively costly investment, perhaps not even with it; though Carr seems ultra-sceptical of the possibilities of irrigation, though less so of afforestation. Spanish industry was a marginal phenomenon, uncompetitive on the world market, and therefore dependent on the feeble domestic market and (notably in the case of Catalonia) the relics of the empire. It was liberal Barcelona which resisted Cuban independence most ferociously, since 60 per cent of its exports went there. The Catalan and Basque bourgeoisie were not an adequate basis for Spanish capitalism. As Vilar has shown, the Catalan businessmen failed to capture the direction of the national economic policy, and therefore retreated into the defensive posture of autonomism, which the Republic eventually conceded to them and the Basques.

Under these circumstances the economic and social basis of liberalism and its political striking-force, were feeble. As in so many underdeveloped countries, there were two active forces in politics: the urban petty-bourgeoisie, standing in the shadow of the urban plebs, and the army, an institution for furthering the careers of energetic members of the same stratum, and a militant trade union for the most powerfully organized sector of the white-collar unemployed, who had to look to the state because the economy could not employ them. The 'pronunciamento', a curious Iberian invention whose rituals became highly traditional, replaced liberal politics in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the second half it became 'a speculative business enterprise for generals' and in the twentieth century it ceased to have any connection with liberalism.

Revolutions began with a pronunciamento or with what Carr calls the 'primitive provincial revolution' — plebeian risings spreading from town to town by contagion — or both. The fighting poor were essential, but perilous. Local notables, not to mention national ones, retreated from the ever-present danger of social revolution into the 'committee stage', when local power passed to juntas of notables with an optional representative or two of the people, while the national government collapsed. 'The final stage was the reimposition, by a ministry that "represented" the revolution, of central government control.' Kiernan's monograph on 1854 describes and explains this process in full detail.[2] Of course in the nineteenth century a proletariat barely existed outside Barcelona, which consequently became the classical revolutionary city of western Europe. The peasantry long remained politically ineffective, or Carlist, i.e. attached to ultra-reactionary politicians and hostile on principle to the towns.

Spanish liberalism was thus squeezed into the narrow space of manoeuvre between the 'primitive revolution', without which nothing would change, and the need to damp it down almost immediately. It was not surprising that a vehicle obliged to brake almost as soon as the foot hit the accelerator, could not get very far. The best hope of the bourgeois moderates was to put some regime in power which would allow the forces of capitalist development to develop; but they never developed enough. Their most usual achievement was to find some formula which neutralized social revolution or the ultra-reactionaries for a while by the combination of at least two of the three forces of 'official' politics: the army, the crown and the 'official' parties. As Carr shows, this was the pattern of Spanish politics: army plus politicians in the 1840s, crown plus politicians after 1875, army plus crown under Primo de Rivera in the 1920s, and a collapse of the crown when it alienated the other two, as in 1854, 1868 and 1931. When there was no crown there had to be an '*ad hoc* military dictatorship'.

Yet Franco is not simply the successor of Alfonso. For in the twentieth century the forces of social revolution grew stronger than they had been in the nineteenth, because revolution retained its 'primitive' assets while acquiring two new and formidable assets: peasant revolution and the labour movement. It is their failure which poses the major problem of Spanish history and may perhaps throw light on a number of other underdeveloped countries. That failure was due to the anarchists.

This does not mean that the remarkable ineffectiveness of the Spanish revolution is due merely to the historic accident that Spain was colonized by Bakunin more than by Marx. (Even this is not quite an accident. It is characteristic of the cultural isolation of underdeveloped countries in the nineteenth century that so often ideas which were unimportant in the wider world became immensely influential there, like the philosophy of a certain Krause in Spain, or the politics of August Comte in Mexico and Brazil.) The facts of Spanish geography and history are against a nationally coordinated movement, but countries with at least as much regional and more national diversity have achieved one, like Yugoslavia. The self-contained universe of the Spanish pueblo long made national changes the result of periodic plebiscites by direct action of its municipalities. But other countries also know the phenomenon of extreme localism, for instance Italy. All the Spanish revolutions, as Carr shows, had an archaic house-style, irrespective of the ideological labels they brandished. It is doubtful whether 'Belmonte de los Caballeros' an Aragonese pueblo, would have behaved differently in 1931–6 had it been organized by the CNT rather than by the socialist UGT. Anarchism succeeded so well, because it was content to provide a mere label for

[2] V. G. Kiernan, *The Revolution of 1854 in Spanish History*, Oxford, 1966.

the traditional political habits of revolutionary Spaniards. Yet political movements are not obliged to accept the historic characteristics of their environment, though they will be ineffective if they pay no attention to them. Anarchism was a disaster because it made no attempt to change the style of primitive Spanish revolt, and deliberately reinforced it.

It legitimized the traditional impotence of the poor. It turned politics, which even in its revolutionary form is a practical activity, into a form of moral gymnastics, a display of individual or collective devotion, self-sacrifice, heroism or self-improvement which justified its failure to achieve any concrete results by the argument that only revolution was worth fighting for, and its failure in revolution by the argument that anything which involved organization and discipline did not deserve the name. Spanish anarchism is a profoundly moving spectacle for the student of popular religion — it was really a form of secular millennialism — but not, alas, for the student of politics. It threw away political chances with a marvellously blind persistence. The attempts to steer it into a less suicidal course succeeded too late, though they were enough to defeat the generals' rising in 1936. Even then, they succeeded incompletely. The noble gunman Durruti, who symbolized both the ideal of the anarchist militant and conversion to the Organization and discipline of real war, was probably killed by one of his own purist comrades.

This is not to deny the remarkable achievement of Spanish anarchism which was to create a working-class movement that remained genuinely revolutionary. Social democratic and in recent years even communist trade unions have rarely been able to escape either schizophrenia or betrayal of their socialist convictions, since for practical purposes — i.e. when acting as trade union militants or leaders — they must usually act on the assumption that the capitalist system is permanent. The CNT did not, though this did not make it a particularly effective body for trade unionist purposes, and on the whole it lost ground to the socialist UGT from the *trienio bolchevique* of 1918–20 till after the outbreak of the Civil War, except where the force of anarchist gunmen and long tradition kept rivals out of the field, as in Catalonia and Aragon. Still, Spanish workers as well as peasants remained revolutionary and acted accordingly when the occasion arose. True, they were not the only ones to retain the reflex of insurrection. In several other countries workers brought up in the communist tradition, or in that of maximalist socialism, reacted in a similiar way when nobody stopped them, and it was not until the middle 1930s that this reflex was actively discouraged in the international communist movement

Again, neither the Spanish socialists nor the communists can be acquitted of responsibility for the failure of the Spanish revolution. The communists were fettered by the extreme sectarianism of the International's policy in 1928–34, at the very moment when the fall of the monarchy in 1931 opened up possibilities of strategies of alliance which they were not permitted (and probably unwilling) to use until some years later. Whether their weakness would have allowed them to use these effectively at the time is another matter. The socialists veered from opportunism to a strategically blind maximalism after 1934, which served to strengthen the right rather than to unite the left. Since they were visibly much more dangerous to the right than the anarchists (who were never more than a routine police problem), both because they were better organized and because they were in republican governments, the backlash of reaction was much more serious.

Nevertheless, the anarchists cannot escape major responsibility.[3] Theirs was the basic tradition of labour in most parts of the republic which survived the initial military rising, and such

[3] They can be criticized not only for lending themselves to the irrelevant vendettas of Stalin's secret police, but for discouraging not merely the unpopular or counterproductive excesses of the revolution, but the revolution itself, whose existence they preferred not to stress in their propaganda. But the basic point is that they fought to win the

deeply rooted traditions are difficult to change. Moreover, theirs was potentially still the majority movement of the left in the republic. They were in no position to 'make' the revolution of which they dreamed. But when the decision of the Popular Front government to resist the military rising by all means, including arming the people, turned a situation of social ferment into a revolution, they were its chief initial beneficiaries. There seems little doubt about the initial preponderance of the anarcho-syndicalists in the armed militia, and none about their domination of the great process of 'sovietization' (in the original sense of the word) in Catalonia, Aragon and the Mediterranean coast which (with Madrid) formed the core of the republic.

The anarchists thus shaped or formulated the revolution which the generals had risen to prevent, but had in fact provoked. But the war against the generals remained to be fought, and they were incapable of fighting it effectively either in the military or political sense. This was evident to the great majority of foreign observers and volunteers, especially in Catalonia and Aragon. There it proved impossible even to get the sixty thousand rifles parading on the city streets, let alone the available machine-guns and tanks, to the under-strength and under-equipped units which actually went to the crucial Aragon front. The inefficacy of the anarchist way of fighting the war has recently been doubted by a new school of libertarian historians (including the formidable intellect of Noam Chomsky), reluctant to admit that the communists had the only practical and effective policy for this purpose, and that their rapidly growing influence reflected this fact. Unfortunately it cannot be denied. And the war had to be won, because without this victory the Spanish revolution, however inspiring and perhaps even workable, would merely turn into yet another episode of heroic defeat, like the Paris Commune. And this is what actually happened. The communists, whose policy was the one which could have won the war, gained strength too late and never satisfactorily overcame the handicap of their original lack of mass support.

For the student of politics in general, Spain may merely be a salutary warning against libertarian gestures (with or without pistols and dynamite), and against the sort of people who, like Ferrer, boasted that 'plutot qu'un revolutionnaire je suis un revoke'. For the historian, the abnormal strength of anarchism, or the ineffective 'primitive' revolutionism still needs some explanation. Was it due to the proverbial neglect of the peasantry by the marxists of western Europe, which left so much of the countryside to the Bakuninists? Was it the persistence of small-scale industry and the pre-industrial sub-proletariat? These explanations are not entirely satisfactory. Was it the isolation of Spain, which saved Spanish libertarianism from the crisis of 1914–20 which bankrupted it in France and Italy, thus leaving the way open for communist mass movements? Was it the curious absence of intellectuals from the Spanish labour movement, so unusual in twentieth-century underdeveloped countries? Intellectuals were democrats, republicans, cultural populists, perhaps above all anti-clericals, and active enough in some phases of opposition: but few of them were socialists and virtually none anarchists. (Their role seems in any case to have been limited — even educated Spain, as Carr says rightly, was not a reading nation — and the cafe-table or Ateneo was not, except in Madrid, a form of nation-wide political action.) At all events the leadership of Spanish revolutionary movements suffered from their absence. At present we cannot answer these questions except by speculation.

war and that without victory the revolution was dead anyway. Had the republic survived, there might be more point to criticisms of their policy which, alas, remain academic.

We can, however, place the spontaneous revolutionism of Spain in a wider context, and recent writers like Malefakis[4] have begun to do so. Social revolutions are not made: they occur and develop. To this extent the metaphors of military organization, strategy and tactics, which are so often applied to them both by marxists and their adversaries, can be actively misleading. However, they cannot succeed without establishing the capacity of a national army or government, i.e. to exercise effective national coordination and direction. Where this is totally absent, what might otherwise have turned into a social revolution may be no more than a nationwide aggregate of waves of local social unrest (as in Peru 1960–3), or it may collapse into an anarchic era of mutual massacre (as in Colombia in the years after 1948). This is the crux of the marxist critique of anarchism as a political strategy, whether such a belief in the virtues of spontaneous militancy at all times and places is held by nominal Bakuninists or by other ideologists. Spontaneity can bring down regimes, or at least make them unworkable, but can provide no alternative suitable to any society more advanced than an archaic self-sufficient peasantry, and even then only on the assumption that the forces of the state and of modern economic life will simply go away and leave the self-governing village community in peace. This is unlikely.

There are various ways in which a revolutionary party or movement can establish itself as a potentially national regime before the actual taking of power or during it. The Chinese, Vietnamese and Yugoslav Communist Parties were able to do so in the course of a prolonged guerrilla war, from which they emerged as the state power, but on the evidence of our century this seems to be exceptional. In Russia a brilliantly led Bolshevik Party succeeded in establishing itself as the leader of the decisive political force — the working class in the capital cities and a section of the armed forces — between February and October 1917, and as the only effective contender for state power, which it then exercised as soon as it had taken over the national centre of government, defeating — admittedly with great difficulty and at great cost — the counter-revolutionary armies and local or regional dissidence which lacked this coordination. This was essentially the pattern of the successful French revolutions between 1789 and 1848 which rested on the capture of the capital city combined with the collapse of the old government and the failure to establish an effective alternative national centre of counter-revolution. When the provinces failed to fall into line and an alternative counter-revolutionary government did establish itself, as in 1870–1, the commune of Paris was doomed.

A revolution may establish itself over a longer period of apparently complex and opaque conflict by the combination of a fairly stable class alliance (under the hegemony of one social force) with certain strong regional bases of power. Thus the Mexican revolution emerged as a stable regime after ten years of murderous civil strife, thanks to the alliance of what was to become the national bourgeoisie with the (subaltern) urban working class, conquering the country from a stable power-base in the north.[5] Within this framework the necessary concessions were made to the revolutionary peasant areas and several virtually independent warlords, a stable national regime being constructed step by step during the twenty years or so after the Sonora base had established itself.

The most difficult situation for revolution is probably that in which it is expected to grow out of reforming politics, rather than the initial shock of insurrectionary crisis combined with mass

[4] E. Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain*, New Haven and London, 1970. This book ought to be required reading for all students of the Spanish revolution.

[5] From the days of Obregon until 1934 the presidents came almost without exception from the state of Sonora.

mobilization. The fall of the Spanish monarchy in 1931 was not the result of social revolution, but rather the public ratification of a very general shift of opinion among the political classes of Spain away from the monarchy. The new Republicans might have been pushed decisively towards the left — more specifically, towards agrarian revolution — by the pressure of the masses. But at the time when they were most susceptible to and afraid of it, in 1931, this did not occur. The moderate socialists may or may not have wanted to organize it, but the communists and anarchists who certainly did, failed in their attempt to do so. One cannot simply blame them for this failure. There were both avoidable and — perhaps predominantly — inevitable reasons why 'CNT and communist recruiters in general were so distant from the prevailing peasant mood that both organizations remained primarily urban based even so late as 1936' (Malefakis). The fact remains that 'peasant rebellion became a significant force after 1933, not in 1931, when it might have been politically more efficacious'. And after 1933 it served to mobilize reaction as effectively as — in the long run more effectively than — the forces of revolution. The Spanish revolution was unable to exploit the historical moment when most successful revolutions establish their hegemony: the spell of time during which its potential or actual enemies are demoralized, disorganized and uncertain what to do.

When it broke out it met a mobilized enemy. Perhaps this was inevitable. But it also faced the battle for survival, which it proved incapable of winning. Probably this was not inevitable. And so we remember it, especially those of us to whose lives it belongs, as a marvellous dream of what might have been, an epic of heroism, the Iliad of those who were young in the 1930s. But unless we think of revolutions merely as a series of dreams and epics, the time for analysis must succeed that of heroic memories.

(1966)

Reflections on Anarchism

The present revival of interest in anarchism is a curious and at first sight unexpected phenomenon. Even ten years ago it would have seemed in the highest degree unlikely. At that time anarchism, both as a movement and as an ideology, looked like a chapter in the development of the modern revolutionary and labour movements that had been definitely closed.

As a movement it seemed to belong to the pre-industrial period, and in any case to the era before the first world war and the October revolution, except in Spain, where it can hardly be said to have survived the Civil War of 1936–9. One might say that it disappeared with the kings and emperors whom its militants had so often tried to assassinate. Nothing seemed to be able to halt, or even to slow down, its rapid and inevitable decline, even in those parts of the world in which it had once constituted a major political force — in France, Italy, Latin America. A careful searcher, who knew where to look, might still discover some anarchists even in the 1950s, and very many more ex-anarchists, easily recognizable by such signs as an interest in the poet Shelley. (It is characteristic that this most romantic school of revolutionaries has been more loyal than anyone else, including the literary critics of his own country, to the most revolutionary among English romantic poets.) When I tried to make contact, about this time, with activists in the Spanish anarchist underground in Paris, I was given a rendezvous at a cafe in Montmartre, by the Place Blanche, and somehow this reminder of a long-lost era of bohemians, rebels and avant-garde seemed only too characteristic.

As an ideology, anarchism did not decline so dramatically because it had never had anything like as much success, at least among intellectuals who are the social stratum most interested in ideas. There have probably always been eminent figures in the world of culture who called themselves anarchists (except, curiously enough, in Spain), but most of them seem to have been artists in the wider — or like Pissarro and Signac, the narrower — sense of the word. In any case, anarchism never had an attraction comparable to, say marxism, for intellectuals even before the October revolution. With the exception of Kropotkin, it is not easy to think of an anarchist theorist who could be read with real interest by non-anarchists. There seemed, indeed, no real intellectual room for anarchist theory. The belief in the libertarian communism of self-governing cooperatives as the final aim of revolutionaries, it shared with marxism. The old Utopian socialists had thought more deeply and concretely about the nature of such communities than most anarchists. Even the strongest point in the anarchists' intellectual armoury, their awareness of the dangers of dictatorship and bureaucracy implicit in marxism, was not peculiar to them. This type of critique was made with equal effect and greater intellectual sophistication both by 'unofficial' marxists and by opponents of all kinds of socialism.

In brief, the main appeal of anarchism was emotional and not intellectual. That appeal was not negligible. Everyone who has ever studied, or had anything to do with the real anarchist movement, has been deeply moved by the idealism, the heroism, the sacrifice, the saintliness which it so often produced, side by side with the brutality of the Ukrainian Makhnovshchina or the dedicated gunmen and church-burners of Spain. The very extremism of the anarchist rejection

of state and organization, the totality of their commitment to the overthrow of the present society, could not but arouse admiration; except perhaps among those who had to be active in politics by the side of the anarchists, and found them almost impossible to work with. It is suitable that Spain, the country of Don Quixote, should have been their last fortress.

The most touching epitaph I have heard on an anarchist terrorist, killed a few years ago by the police in Catalonia, was spoken by one of his comrades, without any sense of irony: 'When we were young, and the Republic was founded, we were knightly but also spiritual. We have grown older, but not he. He was a *guerrillero* by instinct. Yes, he was one of the Quixotes who come out of Spain.'

Admirable, but hopeless, It was almost certainly the monumental ineffectiveness of anarchism which, for most people of my generation — the one which came to maturity in the years of the Spanish Civil War — determined our rejection of it. I still recall in the very earliest days of that war, the small town of Puigcerda in the Pyrenees, a little revolutionary republic, filled with free men and women, guns and an immensity of discussion. A few trucks stood in the plaza. They were for the war. When anyone felt like going to fight on the Aragonese front, he went to the trucks. When a truck was full, it went to the front. Presumably, when the volunteers wanted to come back, they came back. The phrase *C'est magnifique, mais ce nest pas la guerre* should have been invented for such a situation. It was marvellous, but the main effect of this experience on me was, that it took me twenty years before I was prepared to see Spanish anarchism as anything but a tragic farce.

It was much more than this. And yet, no amount of sympathy can alter the fact that anarchism as a revolutionary movement has failed, that it has almost been designed for failure.

As Gerald Brenan, the author of the best book on modern Spain, has put it: a single strike of (socialist) miners in the Asturias shook the Spanish government more than seventy years of massive anarchist revolutionary activity, which presented little more than a routine police problem. (Indeed, subsequent research has shown that in the era of maximum bomb-throwing in Barcelona, there were probably not a hundred policemen looking after public order in that city, and their number was not notably reinforced.) The ineffectiveness of anarchist revolutionary activities could be documented at length, and for all countries in which this ideology played an important role in politics. This is not the place for such a documentation. My point is simply to explain why the revival of interest in anarchism today seems so unexpected, surprising and — if I am to speak frankly — unjustified.

Unjustified, but not inexplicable. There are two powerful reasons which explain the vogue for anarchism: the crisis of the world communist movement after Stalin's death and the rise of revolutionary discontent among students and intellectuals, at a time when objective historical factors in the developed countries do not make revolution appear very probable.

For most revolutionaries the crisis of communism is essentially that of the USSR and the regimes founded under its auspices in eastern Europe; that is to say of socialist systems as understood in the years between the October revolution and the fall of Hitler. Two aspects of these regimes now seemed more vulnerable to the traditional anarchist critique than before 1945, because the October revolution was no longer the only successful revolution made by communists, the USSR was no longer isolated, weak and threatened with destruction, and because the two most powerful arguments for the USSR — its immunity to the economic crisis of 1929 and its resistance to fascism — lost their force after 1945.

Stalinism, that hypertrophy of the bureaucratized dictatorial state, seemed to justify the Bakuninite argument that the dictatorship of the proletariat would inevitably become simple dictatorship, and that socialism could not be constructed on such a basis. At the same time the removal of the worst excesses of Stalinism made it clear that even without purges and labour camps the kind of socialism introduced in the USSR was very far from what most socialists had had in mind before 1917, and the major objectives of that country's policy, rapid economic growth, technological and scientific development, national security etc., had no special connections with socialism, democracy or freedom. Backward nations might see in the USSR a model of how to escape from their backwardness, and might conclude from its experience and from their own that the methods of economic development pioneered and advocated by capitalism did not work in their conditions, whereas social revolution followed by central planning did, but the main object was 'development'. Socialism was the means to it and not the end. Developed nations, which already enjoyed the material level of production to which the USSR still aspired, and in many cases far more freedom and cultural variety for their citizens, could hardly take it as their model, and when they did (as in Czechoslovakia and the gdr) the results were distinctly disappointing.

Here again it seemed reasonable to conclude that this was not the way to build socialism. Extremist critics — and they became increasingly numerous — concluded that it was not socialism at all, however distorted or degenerate. The anarchists were among those revolutionaries who had always held this view, and their ideas therefore became more attractive. All the more so as the crucial argument of the 1917–45 period, that Soviet Russia however imperfect, was the only successful revolutionary regime and the essential basis for the success of revolution elsewhere, sounded much less convincing in the 1950s and hardly convincing at all in the 1960s.

The second and more powerful reason for the vogue of anarchism has nothing to do with the USSR, except in so far as it was fairly clear after 1945 that its government did not encourage revolutionary seizures of power in other countries. It arose out of the predicament of revolutionaries in non-revolutionary situations. As in the years before 1914, so in the 1950s and early 1960s western capitalism was stable and looked like remaining stable. The most powerful argument of classic marxist analysis, the historic inevitability of proletarian revolution, therefore lost its force; at least in the developed countries. But if history was not likely to bring revolution nearer, how would it come about?

Both before 1914 and again in our time anarchism provided an apparent answer. The very primitiveness of its theory became an asset. Revolution would come because revolutionaries wanted it with such passion, and undertook acts of revolt constantly, one of which would, sooner or later, turn out to be the spark which would set the world on fire. The appeal of this simple belief lay not in its more sophisticated formulations, though such extreme voluntarism could be given a philosophical basis (the pre-1914 anarchists often tended to admire Nietzsche as well as Stirner) or founded on social psychology as with Sorel. (It is a not altogether accidental irony of history that such theoretical justifications of anarchist irrationalism were soon to be adapted into theoretical justifications of fascism.) The strength of the anarchist belief lay in the fact that there seemed to be no alternative other than to give up the hope of revolution.

Of course neither before 1914 nor today were anarchists the only revolutionary voluntarists. All revolutionaries must always believe in the necessity of taking the initiative, the refusal to wait upon events to make the revolution for them. At some times — as in the Kautsky era of social democracy and the comparable era of postponed hope in the orthodox communist movement

of the 1950s and 1960s — a dose of voluntarism is particularly salutary. Lenin was accused of Blanquism, just as Guevara and Regis Debray have been, with somewhat greater justification. At first sight such non-anarchist versions of the revolt against 'historic inevitability' seem much the more attractive since they do not deny the importance of objective factors in the making of revolution, of organization, discipline, strategy and tactics.

Nevertheless, and paradoxically, the anarchists may today have an occasional advantage over these more systematic revolutionaries. It has recently become fairly clear that the analysis on which most intelligent observers based their assessment of political prospects in the world must be badly deficient. There is no other explanation for the fact that several of the most dramatic and far-reaching developments in world politics recently have been not merely unpredicted, but so unexpected as to appear almost incredible at first sight. The events of May 1968 in France are probably the most striking example. When rational analysis and prediction leads so many astray, including even most marxists, the irrational belief that anything is possible at any moment may seem to have some advantages. After all, on 1 May 1968, not even in Peking or Havana did anyone seriously expect that within a matter of days barricades would rise in Paris, soon to be followed by the greatest general strike in living memory. On the night of 9 May it was not only the official communists who opposed the building of barricades, but a good many of the Trotskyist and Maoist students also, for the apparently sound reason that if the police really had orders to fire, the result would be a brief but substantial massacre. Those who went ahead without hesitation were the anarchists, the anarchizers, the *situationnistes*. There are moments when simple revolutionary or Napoleonic phrases like *del'audace, encore de l'audace* or on *s'engage etpuis on voit* work. This was one of them. One might even say that this was an occasion when only the blind chicken was in a position to find the grain of corn.

No doubt, statistically speaking, such moments are bound to be rare. The failure of Latin American guerrilla movements and the death of Guevara are reminders that it is not enough to want a revolution, however passionately, or even to start guerrilla war. No doubt the limits of anarchism became evident within a few days, even in Paris. Yet the fact that once or twice pure voluntarism has produced results cannot be denied. Inevitably it has increased the appeal of anarchism.

Anarchism is therefore today once again a political force. Probably it has no mass basis outside the movement of students and intellectuals and even within the movement it is influential rather as a persistent current of 'spontaneity' and activism rather than through the relatively few people who claim to be anarchists. The question is therefore once again worth asking what is the value of the anarchist tradition today?

In terms of ideology, theory and programmes, that value remains marginal. Anarchism is a critique of the dangers of authoritarianism and bureaucracy in states, parties and movements, but this is primarily a symptom that these dangers are widely recognized. If all anarchists had disappeared from the face of the earth the discussion about these problems would go on much as it does. Anarchism also suggests a solution in terms of direct democracy and small self-governing groups, but I do not think its own proposals for the future have so far been either very valuable or very fully thought out. To mention only two considerations. First, small self-governing direct democracies are unfortunately not necessarily libertarian. They may indeed function only because they establish a consensus so powerful that those who do not share it voluntarily refrain from expressing their dissent; alternatively, because those who do not share the prevailing view leave the community, or are expelled. There is a good deal of information about the operation

of such small communities, which I have not seen realistically discussed in anarchist literature. Second, both the nature of the modern social economy and of modern scientific technology raise problems of considerable complexity for those who see the future as a world of self-governing small groups. These may not be insoluble, but unfortunately they are certainly not solved by the simple call for the abolition of the state and bureaucracy, nor by the suspicion of technology and the natural sciences which so often goes with modern anarchism.[1] It is possible to construct a theoretical model of libertarian anarchism which will be compatible with modern scientific technology, but unfortunately it will not be socialist. It will be much closer to the views of Mr Goldwater and his economic adviser Professor Milton Friedman of Chicago than to the views of Kropotkin. For (as Bernard Shaw pointed out long ago in his pamphlet on the Impossibilities of Anarchism), the extreme versions of individualist liberalism are logically as anarchist as Bakunin.

It will be clear that in my view anarchism has no significant contribution to socialist theory to make, though it is a useful critical element. If socialists want theories about the present and the future, they will still have to look elsewhere, to Marx and his followers, and probably also to the earlier Utopian socialists, such as Fourier. To be more precise: if anarchists want to make a significant contribution they will have to do much more serious thinking than most of them have recently done.

The contribution of anarchism to revolutionary strategy and tactics cannot be so easily dismissed. It is true that anarchists are as unlikely to make successful revolutions in the future as they have been in the past. To adapt a phrase used by Bakunin of the peasantry: they may be invaluable on the first day of a revolution, but they are almost certain to be an obstacle on the second day. Nevertheless, historically their insistence on spontaneity has much to teach us. For it is the great weakness of revolutionaries brought up in any of the versions derived from classical marxism, that they tend to think of revolutions as occurring under conditions which can be specified in advance, as things which can be, at least in outline, foreseen, planned and organized. But in practice this is not so.

Or rather, most of the great revolutions which have occurred and succeeded, have begun as 'happenings' rather than as planned productions. Sometimes they have grown rapidly and unexpectedly out of what looked like ordinary mass demonstrations, sometimes out of resistance to the acts of their enemies, sometimes in other ways — but rarely if ever did they take the form expected by organized revolutionary movements, even when these had predicted the imminent occurrence of revolution. That is why the test of greatness in revolutionaries has always been their capacity to discover the new and unexpected characteristics of revolutionary situations and to adapt their tactics to them. Like the surfer, the revolutionary does not create the waves on which he rides, but balances on them. Unlike the surfer — and here serious revolutionary theory diverges from anarchist practice — sooner or later he stops riding on the wave and must control its direction and movement.

Anarchism has valuable lessons to teach, because it has — in practice rather than in theory — been unusually sensitive to the spontaneous elements in mass movements. Any large and disci-

[1] An illustration of this complexity may be given from the history of anarchism. I take it from J. Martinez Alier's valuable study of landless labourers in Andalusia in 1964–5. From the author's careful questioning it is clear that the landless labourers of Cordova, traditionally the mass basis of Spanish rural anarchism, have not changed their ideas since 1936 — except in one respect. The social and economic activities of even the Franco regime have convinced them that the state cannot simply be rejected, but has some positive functions. This may help to explain why they no longer seem to be anarchists.

plined movement can order a strike or demonstration to take place, and if it is sufficiently large and disciplined, it can make a reasonably impressive showing. Yet there is all the difference between the CGT's token general strike of 13 May 1968 and the ten millions who occupied their places of work a few days later without a national directive. The very organizational feebleness of anarchist and anarchizing movements has forced them to explore the means of discovering or securing that spontaneous consensus among militants and masses which produces action. (Admittedly it has also led them to experiment with ineffective tactics such as individual or small-group terrorism which can be practised without mobilizing any masses and for which, incidentally, the organizational defects of anarchism do not suit anarchists.)

The student movements of the past few years have been like anarchist movements, at least in their early stages, in so far as they have consisted not of mass organizations but of small groups of militants mobilizing the masses of their fellow students from time to time. They have been obliged to make themselves sensitive to the mood of these masses, to the times and issues which will permit mass mobilization.

In the United States, for instance they belong to a primitive kind of movement, and its weaknesses are evident — a lack of theory, of agreed strategic perspectives, of quick tactical reaction on a national scale. At the same time it is doubtful whether any other form of mobilization could have created, maintained and developed so powerful a national student movement in the United States in the 1960s. Quite certainly this could not have bden done by the disciplined small groups of revolutionaries in the old tradition — communist, Trotskyist or Maoist — who constantly seek to impose their specific ideas and perspectives on the masses and in doing so isolate themselves more often than they mobilize them.

These are lessons to be learned not so much from the actual anarchists of today whose practice is rarely impressive, as from a study of the historic experience of anarchist movements. They are particularly valuable in the present situation, in which new revolutionary movements have often had to be built on and out of the ruins of the older ones. For let us not be under any illusions. The impressive 'new left' of recent years is admirable, but in many respects it is not only new, but also a regression to an earlier weaker, less developed form of the socialist movement, unwilling or unable to benefit from the major achievements of the international working-class and revolutionary movements in the century between the Communist Manifesto and the Cold War.

Tactics derived from anarchist experience are a reflection of this relative primitiveness and weakness, but in such circumstances they may be the best ones to pursue for a time. The important thing is to know when the limits of such tactics have been reached. What happened in France in May 1968 was less like 1917 than like 1830 or 1848. It is inspiring to discover that, in the developed countries of western Europe, any kind of revolutionary situation, however momentary, is possible once again. But it would be equally unwise to forget that 1848 is at the same time the great example of a successful spontaneous European revolution, and of its rapid and unmitigated failure.

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