

# **MARXISM AND ANARCHISM**

## **Rapprochement, synthesis or separation?**

*Text written around 1989 in the context of an internal training of the “Pierre Besnard” group of the Fédération anarchiste. Slightly modified in October 1999.*

The collapse of the Soviet bloc seems to arouse fears among some comrades about the possible recuperation of ideas specific to the anarchist movement by the survivors of Marxism, anxious to regain a form of virginity. This is a justified fear, and this recuperation is not a new phenomenon, since it began during Marx's lifetime and was observed by Bakunin himself.

In itself, I see no objection to the Marxist current “recuperating” concepts specific to anarchism: it simply proves that they are relevant. On the contrary, it should encourage us to express our own positions publicly and always more clearly.

### **I. - WHAT IS IRRECOVERABLE IN MARXISM**

The first question we can ask ourselves is: what is irretrievable in Marxism? This is a question that cannot be answered if we don't specify *what Marxism* we are talking about.

I would say that we can answer on three levels:

### **Marxism as a theoretical corpus**

We can choose to consider only the texts of Marx himself, and at the very least those of Engels, in their entirety, including the correspondence, in order to try to understand what he/they meant. This is the most rational approach, and one that allows us to get, intellectually speaking, the most accurate idea.

But even with this approach there can be significant differences of opinion. Some authors take the whole of his work without distinction. Others see a break between his early writings and the others. The political stakes are not negligible. Indeed, the early writings, those ranging from the 1844 Manuscripts to the *Manifesto* not included, are imbued with humanism inspired by Ludwig Feuerbach. Also, when one wants to insist on the humanistic aspect of his thought, one refers to these works because we find nothing in this register after 1848.

Others see a break in his thinking caused by Stirner's influence. In 1845, the latter had made a ruthless criticism of humanism which had traumatised Marx to the point of writing a 300-page rebuttal of Stirner's book, *The Unique and Its Property*, which looked very much like an attempt at exorcism, after which there was never again any question of humanism in Marx.

In addition, Marx and Engels did not express publicly all that they thought inwardly. A comparison of their published texts and their correspondence may therefore be useful. For example, it is in his correspondence with Friedrich Sorge, one of his followers, that we learn the reasons why Marx wrote *The Civil War in France*. In the absence of this detail, everything that can be said on this issue is counter-sense.

But it is obvious that Marxism is not limited to that; it is a complex and moving doctrine.

This is why the determination of what anarchism can retain or reject in Marxism must be subject to a critical examination avoiding any global rejection. We must avoid limiting ourselves to the divergences and polemics that may have taken place during the lifetime of Proudhon, Marx, Bakunin, etc., which took on a dramatic or spectacular character. It is necessary to step back and assess the many points of convergence between Marxism and anarchism, which Marxist and anarchist militants are often reluctant to acknowledge.

## **Marxism as it was applied during Marx's lifetime**

We know this famous phrase of Marx: “All I know is that I am not a Marxist”<sup>1</sup>. This phrase has often been interpreted as Marx’s refusal to see his doctrine become dogmatism. It’s actually much more trivial. He had just read a particularly indigestible book written by Paul Lafargue, *Le déterminisme économique de Karl Marx* [Karl Marx’s economic determinism]. Marx then cried out: “If that is Marxism, I, Karl Marx, am not a Marxist!.”

What essentially defines “real” Marxism before Lenin is parliamentarianism. Bakunin’s criticism of Marxist policy is aimed at its parliamentary strategy. But it is obvious that Bakunin could not know everything, at the time, about what Marx thought of this policy; he based his criticism on what he knew of Marx’s practical activity. It must be understood, however, that Marx and Engels’ point of view was not reduced to a bleating parliamentarianism, I would say. They were very upset by the parliamentary cretinism of certain German socialist leaders.

For them, parliamentary action was only a step towards the working class taking power, and then the working class would be able to carry out “despotic encroachments” against bourgeois property, according to the *Manifesto*’s formula. It is not, therefore, a simple flat reformism that expected capitalist society to be transformed through gradual reforms into a socialist society. In fact, on closer inspection, their position was quite close to that of the French Communist Party. Those who know the Communist Party closely, and especially its “informed” activists, know that it does not care about

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1 These words were addressed by Marx to Lafargue and reported by Engels to Bernstein on November 2-3, 1882. Engels repeated himself later in a letter to Conrad Schmidt, August 5, 1890.

parliamentarianism and is under no illusions about parliamentary action<sup>2</sup>.

There is another source of error in what Bakunin says about what Marx thought of the parliamentary strategy. He often attributes to Marx the positions of Ferdinand Lassalle. This is particularly the case on the theory of the state and the question of “state communism”. However, Bakunin is not responsible for these errors because Marx remained vague for a long time about his disagreements with Lasalle.

At the congress in The Hague, at which the Bakunin and James Guillaume were excluded, Marx declared that it was necessary to take into account the institutions, morals and traditions of the different countries and that in some of them, in England, America and perhaps Holland, the workers could “achieve their goal by peaceful means”, but, he added, “in most countries of the continent, it is the force that must be the lever of our revolutions”. Parliamentary action, as we can see, was therefore seen as only one action among others. It is true that this relativisation may have been the consequence of the violent criticism of parliamentary illusions by the Bakunin and his followers. However, Marx and Engels were particularly naive about the ability to change society through parliamentary democracy.

They believed that in countries where democracy existed it would be possible to achieve socialism, and that some form of violence would be necessary in countries where universal suffrage did not exist. Bakunin had warned that even where democracy existed, the bourgeoisie would never allow itself to be dispossessed.

Almost twenty years later, Engels took another step. In 1891, when the two main demands of the 1848 revolutionaries,

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2 The collapse of the Communist Party's influence in the French political landscape changes the perspective, but what I say remains valid however, with regard to the old militants who cling to the old party line. *(note from 2020)*

national unity and a representative regime, were achieved, Engels noted that “the government has all executive power”, and the “chambers do not even have the power to refuse taxes”. “The fear of a renewal of the law against the socialists paralyses the work of social democracy,” he says, confirming Bakunin's view that democratic forms offer few guarantees for the people. “Government despotism” thus finds a new and effective form in the pseudo-will of the people. Engels contrasts Germany with “those countries where popular representation concentrates all the power within itself, where according to the constitution you can do what you want, as long as you have the majority of the nation behind you”. It would therefore be enough if the majority of the population agreed, and if the institutions allowed it, for socialism to be feasible. Engels does not question how such prerequisites could be met. In this kind of statement, which is not isolated, is revealed the legal formalism according to which it goes without saying that if a majority of the population decides on measures that go against the effective interests of big capital, the latter will respect the popular verdict because it is the law. Bakunin showed that democracy only works if it does not question the sustainability of the capitalist system.

In 1895 Engels finally followed his reasoning to its logical conclusion: “The irony of history turns everything upside down. We, the “revolutionists,” the “upsetters,” we thrive much better with legal than with illegal means in forcing an overthrow.”<sup>3</sup>

So we see two essential points: neither Marx nor Engels limit the action of the labour movement to peaceful and legal action. But they remain convinced that where “institutions”, “morals” and “traditions” allow it, workers will be able, through legal channels, to “seize political supremacy to establish the new organization of work” (Marx). While Bakunin is wrong to limit the action advocated by Marx and

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3 Engels, Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*.

Engels to legal action, his critique of their illusions that “the old society can peacefully evolve towards the new” (Engels) in an authentic representative regime remains relevant.

Marx's criticism of German social democracy during his lifetime cannot be denied; it was, however, undoubtedly his heir, despite Lassalian influences. From critical parliamentarianism to parliamentarianism at all, there is really no dividing line: both play on the illusion that elections can be used for something.

In fact, to find out what is irretrievable in Marxism in its contemporary form, one need only consider the points Bakunin was particularly critical of: electoral strategy and forms of organization, both of which are, moreover, perfectly interrelated.

Bakunin underlined several points:

- “All the lies of the representative system rest on that fiction, that a power and a legislative chamber elected by the people absolutely must or even can represent the real will of the people.” (“The Bears of Berne and the Bear of Saint-Petersburg”)

- If the bourgeoisie has the leisure and education necessary for the exercise of government, the same cannot be said of the people. Therefore, even if the institutional conditions for political equality are fulfilled, it remains a fiction.

- Moreover (and here we are touching on parliamentary “technology”), the laws most of the time have a very special scope, they escape the attention of the people and their understanding: “Taken separately, each of these laws seems too insignificant to interest the people much, but together they form a network that links them together. »

- The role of bourgeois ideology in the working class, the influence of the “bourgeois socialists,” the existence of layers with divergent interests in the working class: all this could

prevent the proletariat, even if it were in the majority, from reaching homogeneous positions.

- Finally, whether the proletariat (and with it the small peasantry) is in the majority or not is of little importance; what matters is that it is the productive class. This idea of the social function of the productive class is essential, and it is perfectly summarized in a text dating from 1869, “Integral Instruction”: “It very often happens that an intelligent worker is forced to keep silent in front of a learned fool who beats him, not by the spirit he does not have, but by the instruction, of which the worker is deprived, and which he could not receive, because, while his foolishness was developing scientifically in the schools, the work of the worker clothed him, housed him, fed him, and provided him with all the things, masters and books, necessary for his instruction.”

Under such conditions, the question of numerical majority is of little importance. In the Middle Ages, the productive forces were poorly developed and labour productivity was very low: maintaining a small number of privileged people required a large mass of productive workers. It is quite possible to conceive of a developed system in which the non-productive strata (not necessarily exploitative, it should be pointed out, but which often develop an exploitative ideology) and the parasitic strata are in the majority, simply because labour productivity is such that a relatively small number of producers and socially necessary workers is sufficient to produce the necessary social surplus value.

One only has to look around and imagine all the professions that could go on unlimited general strike without fundamentally altering our daily existence: military, bailiffs, notaries, etc. On the other hand, we know what a garbage collectors' strike gives after three days...

## **Marxism in its Posthumous Interpretations: Leninism**

The basis of Lenin's position is that the proletariat can only acquire revolutionary consciousness through the mediation of intellectuals of bourgeois origin, because it is they who hold “science”, not the proletarians. This thesis is widely developed in *What Is To Be Done?*, a book Lenin wrote in 1903. But the idea in itself is not his, it is practically a verbatim reprint of Karl Kautsky's theses, a German Social Democrat.

By themselves, the workers can only access the “trade-unionist”, that is to say reformist consciousness. According to Lenin, “the bearer of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intellectuals: it is indeed in the brains of certain individuals of this category that contemporary socialism was born, and it is through them that it was communicated to the most intellectually developed proletarians...”(*What Is To Be Done?*)

To understand the meaning of the Leninist thesis, we must consider three things: its historical and social context; its class content; its objective.

On the first point, Leninism is a characteristic doctrine stemming from the intellectual layers of the middle classes of under-industrialized societies. The class content of Leninism is limpid: It is the political doctrine of the layers of declassed bourgeois intellectuals posing as the self-proclaimed leadership of the working class and seeking a social basis to achieve their ascent to political power. The objective of Leninism is, obviously, to legitimize the power of these social strata. The reference to Marxism only serves to camouflage the political project of these social strata that refer to Marxism only to serve as an ideological alibi for them. This is why I think it is a profound error to say that “Lenin is contained in Marx” or “Stalin is contained in Marx”. It is an oversimplification that



handicaps any attempt to understand both Marxism and Leninism (or even Stalinism).

It must be said that there is nothing equivalent in Marx's work to Lenin's theory of the acquisition of revolutionary consciousness. From this point of view Marx is much closer to Bakunin. When, speaking of the communists, he writes in the *Manifesto* that they “have over the rest of the proletariat [*I underline*] the advantage of a clear intelligence of the conditions of the march and the general ends of the proletarian movement” and that among them there are bourgeois intellectuals who “by dint of labour have risen to the theoretical intelligence of the whole historical movement”, he shows that Leninism is *totally outside the Marxist system of thought* and the same thing can be said of Kautsky whom Lenin copied. Engels confirmed his friend's point of view when he wrote in the 1890 preface to the German reprint of the *Manifesto*: “Marx relied solely on the intellectual development of the working class, as it was bound to result from joint action and discussion” — which is totally in line with Bakunin's point of view.

Bolshevism is the ideological expression of the political and economic backwardness of Tsarist Russia. Lenin's followers do not seem to want to question the historical anomaly that established a regime claiming to be proletarian in a country where there were 3% of workers, practically no middle class and an overwhelming majority of peasants.

What disqualifies Leninism is that his assertions are false. At the same time that Lenin was writing that the working class could only achieve a reformist consciousness, workers in most industrial countries were developing revolutionary syndicalism, in which they clearly affirmed that their emancipation would be their own work.

As far as Leninism is concerned, I will be extremely brief: there is nothing salvageable. I could take point by point all that

defines Leninism and refute it. It seems simpler to me to say that there is nothing salvageable about Leninism because it applies to a context and an epoch that have disappeared. Leninism is the revolutionary ideology of the intellectual petty-bourgeoisie with no future prospects in an underdeveloped country dominated by imperialism, as was precisely the case in Russia in 1917. It is therefore no coincidence that Leninist-type movements have flourished in Third World countries in the form of national liberation movements. The nationalism of the dominated countries often took the form of Leninism because it was simply the most suitable form for this context. As with Bolshevism, Marxism was only a cover, a mask for national demands. Leninism corresponds to archaic, pre-capitalist conceptions of organization and political strategy.

### **Marxism as “science”**

When an organization based on Leninist principles takes power, it is not surprising that the policy it implements is oriented towards the monopoly of power by a minority of knowledge-holding managers. This is because the leadership of the vanguard of the proletariat has, to use Lucaks' expression, received “its sharpest weapon from the hands of true science,” Marxism, of which Lenin also said:

“You cannot eliminate even one basic assumption, one substantial part of this philosophy of Marxism (it is as if it were a solid block of steel) without abandoning objective truth, without falling into the arms of the bourgeois-reactionary falsehood<sup>4</sup>.”

This is a perfect example of ideological vision. This kind of proclamation, motivated by the desire to assert a scientific formulation, has obviously more to do with religious faith than

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4 Lenin, *Materialism and empiriocriticism*, Collected Works, Moscow, vol. XIII, p. 281.

with rational reasoning, and reveals the extent of the intellectual regression that Marxism has suffered from Lenin's conceptions of Marxism. When the truth is not so much a matter of ascertaining the facts as of interpreting a dogma, one quickly witnesses an appalling political degeneration of which we have seen some examples: Trotsky brushing aside the “changing moods” of workers' democracy; Radek decided not to give in to the “clamour of the workers”<sup>5</sup> who do not “understand their true interests”; Bukharin feeling sorry for the bad working conditions... of the Chekists!

Possession of “true science” constitutes a real act of ownership over the working class; it legitimizes its holders as the self-proclaimed leadership of the workers' movement. The slightest challenge to the party's line – whether it is expressed inside or outside the party – is not simply a political divergence, it is an attack on the “real science” elaborated by the leaders, and as such is outside any discussion. The slightest challenge to the foundations of this “true science” constitutes a violation that rejects its author without discussion into the ranks of the class enemy. Let us remember that on the occasion of a divergence with Lenin, Bukharin was accused of “understanding nothing of dialectics” — a capital sin — which shows that divergences are not expressed on the basis of factual or rational elements, but with reference to dogma.

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5 “The Party is the politically conscious vanguard of the working class. We are now at a point where the workers, at the end of their endurance, refuse any longer to follow a vanguard which leads them to the battle and sacrifice... Ought we to yield to the clamours of workingmen who have reached the limit of their patience and who do not understand their true interests as we do? Their state of mind is at present frankly reactionary. But the Party has decided that we must *not* yield, that we must impose our will to victory on our exhausted and despirited followers.” (Quoted by Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, Pelican book, p. 24.)

Faced with a problem, there can only be one solution, the one given by the patent holders and interpreters of science; the other solutions can only be the product of bourgeois ideology.

Need it be said that such conceptions of “science” are tragically limiting, that the history of science shows many examples of results obtained by different methods, and that, moreover, the very nature of a scientific theory is to be systematically called into question by new hypotheses and new discoveries? Lenin hides behind the concept of science in order to guarantee his distorted conception of Marxism a durability that no science recognizes itself: science can only exist because:

1° the dominant conceptions of an epoch are systematically examined from different points of view, and,

2° because they are systematically rendered obsolete by new theories.

The whole problem of “science”, from Lenin's point of view, consists in determining who, and according to what modalities, determines the correct interpretation, i.e. orthodoxy. Thus, when Lenin says to N. Valentinov: “Orthodox Marxism needs no modification, neither in its philosophy, nor in its theory of political economy, nor in its political consequences”<sup>6</sup>, he is not only expressing the most anti scientific point of view possible (i.e., a scientific theory - Marxism - is immutably valid), he is exposing an aberration from the dialectical point of view. But the problem it poses is indeed that of determining who decides on the correct interpretation. Automatic line return

This is a problem that is easily solved:

“Classes are led by parties, and parties are led by individuals who are called leaders. (...) This is the ABC, the will of a class can be carried out by a dictatorship, Soviet democracy is in no way

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6 Valentinov, N. *My talks with Lenin*.

incompatible with the dictatorship of an individual.  
(...) What is important is a single leadership, the acceptance of the dictatorial power of one man. (...) All the sentences about equal rights are nonsense<sup>7</sup>.”

We are therefore dealing with a “science” which is not accessible to the understanding by its own content, by the demonstrations it can offer, but which needs to be interpreted, whose misinterpretations do not reveal a misunderstanding of the facts, but express enemy class interests, and whose interpretation, in the final analysis, can only be provided by one man. Any difference of opinion is necessarily caused by an enemy class ideology. To resolve an opposition, it is necessary to “patiently explain”; if it persists, it is because class interests, the survival of petty-bourgeois spirit, anarchism, etc., play a part.

There is only one proletariat, in which there can be only one guiding thought, only one party that is the expression of it. Thus, from the beginning of 1918, the Cheka was presented as the instrument “of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the inexorable dictatorship of a single party” intended to annihilate “the bourgeoisie as a class”<sup>8</sup>.

The modalities of the determination of orthodoxy may be (relatively) peaceful before the seizure of power, but afterwards the stakes are such that, having exhausted all procedures, in an escalation consisting of stages where discussion gradually gives way to physical violence, one inevitably ends up exterminating the opponents – those outside the party first, those inside it second.

Thus, when, in the last round between Zinoviev and Stalin, the party organizations in Leningrad, the stronghold of the former, and in Moscow, controlled by the latter, passed

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7 Quoted by David Shub, *Lénine*, Idées/Gallimard, p. 87.

8 In : *Histoire et bilan de la révolution soviétique*, Association d'études et d'informations politiques internationales, Paris, 1-15 oct. 1957, p. 140.

unanimous resolutions excommunicating each other, Trotsky ironically asked: “What is the social explanation?”

The question is perfectly justified. But one can easily imagine the atmosphere that can prevail in an organization where political differences are perceived as the expression of enemy class interests. Yet the question that Marxist Trotsky should have – but obviously could not – asked is: what is the “social explanation”, the social nature of an organization in which differences are resolved in these terms?

## **II. – ARE THERE ELEMENTS IN MARXISM THAT COULD BE RETAINED BY A REORGANISATION?**

To begin with, the question is poorly put. I would say rather: in Marxist discourse, are there things that are true or relevant? The perspective is completely different.

Marxism is a body of doctrine that the epigones, and Lenin in particular, wanted to present as a coherent “block of steel” where everything was good and nothing to throw away. Now, when we take the trouble to consider Marx's texts as a whole, we see a man who searches, fumbles, who goes backwards, who throughout his life analyses phenomena from different angles, etc.

- Now, from Marxism, we retain only historical determinism, but Marx also says that without chance, human history would be very sad.

- From Marxism, we retain the exclusive explanation of historical phenomena by economic determinations, but Engels acknowledges that they may have been wrong to insist too much on this aspect: “Marx and I are partly responsible for the fact that at times our disciples have laid more weight upon the economic factor than belongs to it. We were compelled to emphasize this main principle in opposition; to our opponents who denied it, and there wasn't always time, place and

occasion to do justice to the other factors in the reciprocal interaction.” (Letter to Joseph Bloch, September 21, 1890).

- From Marxism, we retain a dialectic of the development of capitalism in successive historical phases, But in 1877 he wrote to a Russian correspondent, Mikhailovsky, that it was a mistake to transform his “sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historical-philosophical theory of the general march fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves”<sup>9</sup>.

On March 8, 1881, he confirms in a letter to Vera Zasulich that he “expressly restricted the ‘historical fatality’ of this movement to the countries of western Europe”<sup>10</sup>. In saying this, Marx totally agrees with Bakunin's view that the logic of historical development in Slavic countries was not the same as in Western Europe.

The problem is that these reservations, which were expressed towards the end of their lives by Marx and Engels in their correspondence, are crucial. For lack of having been expressed loud and clear, and publicly developed, the communist movements were put on the rails of a mechanistic, simplifying, vulgar Marxism. These are precisely the three essential points of Bakunin's theoretical refutation of Marx, namely:

1. The existence of a certain historical indeterminism because when one deals with human beings it is impossible to apprehend all the determinations that produce a fact;

2. The refusal to explain everything by economic determinations, even if they are recognized as crucial;

3. The relativization of the theory of the successive phases of historical development, jointly developed by Saint-Simon and Hegel.

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9 Marx, Oeuvres, Économie II, La Pléiade, III, 1555.

10 Marx, Oeuvres, La Pleiade, II, p.1558.

Paradoxically, then, I would say that what is recoverable in Marxism is Bakunin's criticism. By this I mean that Bakunin's objections do not deny Marxism as an explanatory theory of society, as a method of historical and economic analysis, they simply relativize the aspects under which Marxism may have appeared as too absolute or too mechanistic

Bakunin's relativization of Marxism is something unbearable for many communists, precisely because it places Marxism in the current of ideas of the time, as one explanation of the social among others. It deprives Marxism of the quasi-religious character that it had in the minds of many communists and restores to it its status as a scientific hypothesis, that is to say, one that can be refuted, modified, and completed.. Marxism is reduced to what it should never have ceased to be, no longer the absolute science but a theory, a "reading grid" among others, no more or less valid than the sociology of Max Weber, for example, or the psychoanalysis of Eric Fromm.

Now, Marx's observation of the social, of the economic mechanisms of capitalism, is globally the same as that made by Proudhon, with the difference that, having lived longer than Proudhon, Marx was able to develop his ideas more thoroughly and much more clearly.

Bakunin, for example, does not at any time deny the validity of *Capital's* description of the mechanisms of capitalism, he only criticizes the obscurities that make the book inaccessible to the workers. Moreover, it will be up to the anarchist Cafiero to make an "Abstract" of *Capital*, precisely to make it accessible, and to James Guillaume to make an introduction. If we add to this that Bakunin himself had begun to translate the book into Russian, we can say that we have here some credentials that legitimize it ...

As for the concepts, Marxism did not come about by a wave of a magic wand, it was built on an already existing foundation. Most of the concepts that we find developed in *Capital* already



existed when Marx began to write his book. Leroux, Considérant, Proudhon and others provided some of the material. All the economic categories found in Proudhon's *System of Contradictions* are found fifteen years later in *Capital*. Marx added a few more, but he only continued and improved on the work that Proudhon had outlined.

Even the method used in *Capital* is largely indebted to Proudhon, but it is obvious that no Marxist will recognize it.

In conclusion, we can say that what is recoverable in Marxism is recoverable not because it is “Marxist”, but because it is true. Marxism as an explanatory theory of the social has synthesized a certain number of data, concepts, which were “in the air” at the time, and which Marx developed, made explicit, improved and which the anarchists have no reason to reject a priori. What is problematic, however, are the political conclusions that anarchists generally do not approve of.

The fact remains that many of the constituent elements of Marxism (but which, on closer examination, are found in contemporary or earlier authors) have fallen, I might say, into the public domain. This is why the very idea that there might be something “salvageable” in Marxism doesn't even seem relevant to me.

### **III. – CAN MARXISTS RECOVER ANYTHING FROM ANARCHISM?**

The question that now comes to mind is: is there anything in anarchism that Marxists can recover? There are several possibilities: a minimal hypothesis and a maximal hypothesis, with all the intermediate degrees.

The minimal position would consist, for Marxists, in recognizing the validity of Bakunin's reservations about Marxism. If that were the case, we would only have to welcome it, but it would not change much in practice. I don't

think Charles Fiterman<sup>11</sup> would apply for membership of the Anarchist Federation, and the political behaviour of the Communist Party would not be too much affected by it, I don't think.

The maximum position could be something similar to that of Maximilien Rubel. Almost ten years ago I wrote a polemic against his position that Marx was a theorist of anarchism. To tell the truth, one cannot absolutely affirm that his approach is recuperative, because he does not recuperate anything that anarchist theorists have been able to say <sup>12</sup>, on the contrary, he does not recognize anything valid in these anarchist theorists: it is Marx who is the only authentic theoretician of anarchism. According to Rubel, Marx had in mind a book on the State, which he never had the time to write, but which would undoubtedly have been the founding book of true anarchism. This book, which remained in draft form, says Rubel, “could only contain the theory of the society liberated from the state, the anarchist society”<sup>13</sup>.

I cite Rubel's case only as an extreme case. However, it is not questionable that Rubel, who was linked to no organization, who was an isolated and counter-current researcher, had perfectly sincere intentions. This is unlikely to be the case with other attempts. Rubel acknowledges, moreover, that the criticism of the state, of which Rubel says that Marx had claimed exclusivity and which was to form the basis of his “anarchist” thought, “has not even received a start, unless we

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11 Leader of the Communist Party, ex-minister in the socialist government from 1981 to 1984, joined the socialist party in 1998 when he left in 2017/

12 During a show on Radio Libertario to which Rubel and I were invited, I tried to get him to talk about his thesis on “Marx, anarchist theorist” but he always dodged it. On the other hand, he seemed to want to bring Marx and Proudhon closer together and he gave the latter a credit that he refused in his previous texts.

13 M. Rubel, *Marx critique du Marxisme*, ed. Payot, p. 45.

consider the scattered works, especially historical ones, in which Marx laid the foundations of a theory of anarchism.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in spite of a political strategy, a praxis that Maximilian Rubel himself says was contrary to the stated principles, Marx *would have* written, if he had had the time, an anarchist theory of the state and its abolition. Marx's heirs, who now have built a state capitalism that is not in conformity with the anarchist professions of faith – says Rubel - have been nourished by this ambiguity, caused precisely by the absence of the book on the state. In other words Mr. Rubel seems to believe, that if Marx had had the time to write this book, his work would not have had this ambiguity (which Rubel emphasizes on several occasions); and his quality as an anarchist would have come to light. The key to the problem of the destiny of Marxism and of its denaturation resides consequently in this unwritten Book, whose absence caused real Marxism to tip over into the horror of concentration camps. Needless to say, such an argument is a real aberration from the simple point of view of historical materialism.

These few remarks lead me to believe that if Marxist movements were trying to regain a theoretical virginity, they would do so on the basis of a redefinition of the State and its role. I think - beyond Rubel's theoretical excesses - that this is where the possibility of an “encroachment” on the anarchist doctrine would come from, which would moreover be a good thing if it could incite the libertarian movement to deepen its reflection on the State in order to avoid the simplisms to which one is often entitled..

If, when speaking of Marxism, it is necessary to specify which Marxism we are talking about, it is the same for Marxist conceptions of the State. I said earlier that the recuperation of anarchist themes has been denounced by Bakunin himself: I was referring to the book Marx wrote after the Commune, *The*

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14 *Op. cit.*, p. 378.

*Civil War in France*. It's a book in which Marx approaches the Commune by taking up the federalist point of view, whereas he hated federalism. The effect of the Commune, says Bakunin, "was so formidable everywhere, that the Marxians themselves, whose ideas had been overthrown by this insurrection, were obliged to pull their hats off in front of it. They did much more: in a reversal of the simplest logic and of their true feelings, they proclaimed that its program and its goal were theirs. It was a travesty that was truly buffoonish, but forced. They had to do it, or else they would have been overwhelmed and abandoned by everyone, so powerful had been the passion that this revolution had provoked in everyone"<sup>15</sup>. »

We find the same process during the Russian revolution, with Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, which is said to contain the pinnacle of the Marxist theory of the decay of the State, but which is nothing but a confused jumble. Lenin wrote this book in an attempt to reconcile the very active Russian libertarian movement.

What is really going on? Revolutionary movements have a number of constants, among which is the predisposition to constitute autonomous institutions in which the masses try to organize themselves. This is a natural tendency. The self-proclaimed vanguards obviously have no place in this initial movement, but they do what they can to eventually control it.

In the case of *The Civil War in France*, it is very simple to know what Marx really thought: one need only read the letter he wrote to his friend Sorge, in which he expresses his fury at the fact that the communards who had taken refuge in London did not join him: "And this is my reward for having lost almost five months working for the refugees, and for having saved their honour, by the publication of *The Civil War in France*"<sup>16</sup>

This is an example of what I was saying at the beginning of this text: to have a real idea of Marx's thought, you have to

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<sup>15</sup> Bakounine, *Œuvres*, Champ libre, III, 166.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Marx to Sorge, November 9, 1871.

compare the published texts with what he says in his correspondence.

*The Civil War in France* served a great deal to try to give Marxism a vaguely libertarian twist - in defiance of all that its author may have written before and after - and it could still possibly serve as a libertarian manifesto for Marxists who would like to refresh their doctrine. The letter to Sorge reveals the reality of what Marx thought. Concerning *The Civil War in France*, a Marxist like Franz Mehring observes in his *Life of Karl Marx*: "However brilliant these analyses were, they were nonetheless slightly at odds with the ideas defended by Marx and Engels for a quarter of a century and already put forward in the Communist Manifesto (...) Marx and Engels were naturally perfectly aware of this contradiction.... » Mehring confirms Bakunin's point of view in more measured terms.

Concerning the theory of the State and of power, one finds in reality almost everything one wants in Marx.

The libertarian flirtation of *The Civil War* is perceived, of course, as perfectly isolated by the Marxist historian Franz Mehring; but Lenin (temporarily) makes a Marxist dogma of it in *The State and the Revolution*, because, at a given moment, it suited him and he needed the support of the anarchists. In the *Critique of Gotha's program* (1875), Marx does not say a word about the Commune as a form of revolutionary power, while Engels makes a very vague allusion to it in a letter to Bebel on the question: "Therefore we would propose to put everywhere in the place of the word 'State' the word 'Gemeinwesen', an excellent old German word that responds very well to the French word 'commune'<sup>17</sup>."

When Engels wrote a preface to *The Civil War* on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Commune, he exclaimed: "Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words:

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17 Letter from Engels to Bebel, 18-28 March 1875.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

This expression covers completely different meanings, since in 1850 it meant Jacobin dictatorship without popular representation, i.e. the opposite of what Engels said in 1891. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” is emptied of all meaning since it can designate both a most authoritarian and a most libertarian regime!

But that's not all. Also in 1891, Engels criticized the Erfurt program of German Social Democracy, writing: “If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown.” In the same year, Engels thus gave the Commune and the unitary democratic republic as the model of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In fact, the formula “dictatorship of the proletariat” (which is very rarely used in Marx) covers at least three concepts:

- In the Erfurt Manifesto and Program, it means a Jacobin and democratic republic;
- In *18 Brumaire* and *Class struggles in France* it means an ultra-centralized revolutionary dictatorship without popular representation;
- In *The Civil War*, it means a libertarian-type federation.

Marx and Engels' conceptions of the form of workers' power were determined much more by the circumstances of time and place - even if they changed their minds in the same year, as Engels did in 1891 - than by precise principles. Everyone can therefore find something to their liking, all they have to do is pick and choose the right text.

We can play that game too. In case some would absolutely convince us that Marx and Engels were serious about the abolition of the State, we could always remember what Engels

wrote to Carlo Cafiero on July 1, 1871: “As for the abolition of the State, that's an old German philosophical phrase that we used a lot when we were greenhorns...”.

## **CONCLUSION**

Marxism and anarchism have developed separately, certainly, but jointly from identical concerns and with different conclusions. This in no way diminishes their oppositions, of course, but the refusal to consider their genesis from identical conditions makes it impossible to perceive the points on which they agree, and, on the other hand, does not allow us to grasp their differences in their true extent and perspective. Such a glimpse of the points of convergence leads many anarchists to a rejection of Marxism, which is no longer a matter of knowledge or reason but of religious and mystical attitude. Moreover, such an overview of oppositions leads to an attempt at eclectic and perfectly useless syntheses of the “libertarian Marxism” type.

Thus, Marxism and anarchism are not two currents that have developed in two impermeable compartments; they interact with each other, ask the same questions and most of the times find different answers. The most caricatural manifestations of these interactions can be found in the attempts by some anarchists to constitute “libertarian Marxism,” or by some Marxists to convince themselves that Marx was “an anarchist.

Such an attitude stems from the fact that some anarchists or Marxists think that there are deficiencies in their respective doctrines and think they have to go and look in the other doctrine to remedy them.

In addition, some activists who want to fill in the deficiencies of anarchism in terms of “analysis” will speak of “historical materialism” (an expression not found in Marx...), bringing to light their own ignorance of the great libertarian authors.

The expression “libertarian Marxism” was coined by Daniel Guérin towards the end of his life. Of Marxist formation, he was for a time tempted by Trotskyism. He took a critical look at the movements and militants claiming to be Marxist. He believed that a number of libertarian concepts should be introduced into the corpus of socialist ideology in order to avoid the mistakes of social democracy or Stalinism. On most of the questions opposing Marxism and anarchism: centralism or federalism, parliamentarianism or direct social action, dictatorship of the proletariat or direct democracy, Guérin agreed with anarchism, and in particular with Bakunin.

Guérin's libertarian Marxism was not a threat to anarchism. Rather, it was an attempt to introduce anarchist concepts into Marxist doctrine. The idea, however, appealed to some anarchists who, in turn, tried to introduce Marxist concepts into anarchism. Today, many Marxist activists, aware of the devaluation of Marxism, but especially of the conceptual deficiencies of Marxism to explain today's society, are discovering Proudhon and Bakunin. To speak of a synthesis between the two movements seems to me, however, highly exaggerated.

The general conclusion I will draw from my remarks is that we must not make the wrong enemy. If indeed we can observe the use of some of our themes by Marxists, we must see this as confirmation of the relevance of our approach.

The question remains as to the interrelationships that exist, at least at the level of doctrine, between anarchism and Marxism. This is an issue that merits further development.