

ANARCHISM AND MARXISM

Where do anarchists and Marxists differ, and can we learn from each other?

A dialogue between the Libertarian Workers Group and the Revolutionary Socialist League

Editors' note: *We are reprinting in this issue of ideas & action the text of two talks that were delivered last May at a forum in New York sponsored by the Libertarian Workers Group and the Revolutionary Socialist League. Since the RSL now considers itself to be "libertarian socialist," a purpose of the discussion was to see to what extent verbal disagreement on such areas as political parties and the State was just verbal, due to different political backgrounds, and to explore the common ground among those who advocate "socialism from below." Since the talks reprinted here, the LWG has become the New York Group of the Workers Solidarity Alliance. The first comments below are those of Wayne Price, speaking for the RSL. The comments of Mike Harris, representing the LWG, follow. Mike Harris is the national secretary of the Workers Solidarity Alliance.*

Most socialists agree with most opponents of socialism that "socialism" requires a powerful, centralized state. The reformist, social democratic wing of socialism wants the **existing** state to nationalize much of industry and dominate the rest of the economy. But the existing capitalist state is bureaucratic, imperialist and police-ridden, for all its pretense of democracy. Nationalization by such a state would result in a monstrous state capitalism.

In contrast to the social democrats, most revolutionary socialists call for the overthrow of the existing capitalist state, and its replacement by a new, revolutionary state. But they see this as a state run by one elite party, which will "do good" for the people. Their model is Castro's Cuba, Mao's China, sometimes Stalin's Russia, or even Lenin's and Trotsky's Russia of the 1920s. Although their program calls for rule by a benevolent elite, in reality it has always meant a bureaucratic, repressive state capitalism.

Both varieties of statist socialism have proven to be failures, whether we think of the shameful Socialist government of France today, or the tragic Socialist-Communist government of Allende's Chile or the Russian regime, with its record of murder, repression and economic stagnation. Or of hundreds of other examples of tragic defeats and disastrous "victories."

Nor could it be otherwise. Modern industry is so complex that no minority, no matter how wise or benevolent, could run it well. Furthermore, there is bound to develop a conflict of interest between the managing elite and those who are compelled to work at their orders, a class struggle which gets in the way of the smooth functioning of even the best central plan. Whether we think of social democrats managing the existing state or of "Marxist-Leninists" setting up their own one-party state, state capitalism cannot work.

No matter how much it may call itself "socialist," the minority ruling class, East and West, is only capable of mismanaging the world economy until it collapses in chaos; of destroying what democratic rights remain; of killing off the human race through ecological disaster or nuclear war. The only practical alternative, we believe, is participatory socialism.

Given our complex society, there is no practical alternative to a cooperative, democratic society in which every working class person participates in its management. Those who do the work must decide how they will do it, so the distinction between the planners and the doers is erased. Workers at the shop floor must decide themselves how they will do their tasks. Society-wide plans must be made by all of society. At the shop floor level, workers would discuss alternative programs and select representatives from among their co-workers to defend their choices in various councils — at the regional and national (and international) levels. People must be able to freely develop

their own culture, without the imposition of rigid stereotypes on the basis of race or nationality or sex or sexual orientation or whatever. There must be **as little as possible** — only what is **minimally necessary** — of authority, repression, centralization, chain-of-command hierarchy, representation by others, management by experts.

And **as much as is practically possible** of liberty, decentralization, multiplication of centers of initiative, voluntary association, and direct face-to-face democracy.

The Revolutionary Socialist League has been working toward this libertarian viewpoint for some time. We began as Trotskyists who rejected the Russian model as state capitalist. Originally we argued that we alone were the real, orthodox followers of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. But we had to face the fact that we disagree with 99% of those who call themselves Trotskyists, 99% of those who call themselves Leninists, and 99% of those who call themselves Marxists.

We decided that we had better investigate what it was in Marxism that let it be used by the supporters of state capitalism. And at the same time, we should see what we could learn from alternative socialist traditions — particularly anarchism. Our intent is not to abandon Marxism, but to enrich it and expand it in a more libertarian direction. We want to look at the strengths and weaknesses of Marxism and the strengths and weaknesses of anarchism.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Marxism

Both the strong and weak sides of Marxism are rooted in the same thing: Marx's efforts to find the laws of history. In *Capital* and elsewhere, Marx worked out the basic pattern of capitalist development. He explored the forces within capitalism that lead to its self-destruction. He demonstrated that the growth of the modern working class made possible a co-operative, democratic society. All this, we believe, remains essentially true, contrary to the opinion of the many "Marxists" who believe that socialism can be created without and even against the working class. Similarly, our understanding of *Capital* let us explain the end of the post-war



Photo: Peters

Black workers challenge South Africa's bosses

South Africa's *apartheid* system has found its strongest opponent in the developing movement among the country's five million black workers, which poses a threat to the continued existence of exploitation and boss power in South Africa.

There were signs of the new movement in the early 1970s. The city of Durban was paralyzed by a mass strike, or "stay-away" movement, in 1973. By the late '70s it had become clear that the development of a black labor movement could no longer be suppressed outright. A government commission warned that black unions "can unite with other unions through affiliation . . . without government approval and thus embrace strategic industries which can be paralyzed at any given moment." The government response was to legalize the black unions but with severe restrictions on activity, such as compulsory arbitration. But the government has been unable to prevent the existence of unregistered wildcat unions (such as the union of dockworkers) nor has it been able to effectively impose restrictions on the activity of registered unions.

After legalization in '79, membership in black unions soared, from 70,000 to over 300,000. The solidarity — and thus strength — of this movement was demonstrated in Feb. 1982. In the two days after the murder of Neil Aggett, a white organizer for the Food and Canning Workers Union, 100,000 workers, in every major sector and area of the country, joined in a protest strike.

This past Oct. 23rd, the armed thugs in uniform sealed off three black townships south of Johannesburg, arresting at least 340 people in an attempt to halt protests against the *apartheid* system. On Nov. 3rd, the Transvaal Regional Stay-Away Committee — a coalition of black unions, political and student groups — called a two-day general strike to press for withdrawal of troops and police from the black townships,

release of political prisoners and the reinstatement of fired workers. Hundreds of thousands of workers were involved in this strike movement. Nearly 300 people were killed in protests in South Africa during the last three months of 1984.

In response, western European sailors have reportedly begun a movement to block oil and arms traffic for South Africa. Five hundred marchers demonstrated outside the South African embassy in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 4th, demanding the release of unionists arrested for their role in the general strike. Meanwhile, in San Francisco longshoremen refused to unload South African cargo from the Ned-Lloyd lines ship *S.S. Kimberley*. Crews were repeatedly fired as each fresh crew sent to unload the cargo refused to handle the "hot" cargo from South Africa. Although the boycott action had been approved at a union membership meeting in October, the union officials reportedly did not slowdown the dispatch of fresh crews to the ship, thus undermining the rank-and-file's action. The dockers' action was accompanied by demonstrations of supporters at the shift changes (about 500 people showed up on Dec. 1).

A federal judge invoked the Taft-Hartley Act ban on "hot cargo" (secondary boycotts), ordering the union to unload the cargo, and a suit for damages was filed against the union by the employers' association (Pacific Maritime Association). The ILWU Local 6 executive board then ordered the membership back to work and the boycott action was halted after 11 days. Demonstrations have continued at the PMA offices and the Oakland Port Commission has been considering a ban on all South African cargo. But it is certain that this proposal only became worthy of consideration after the longshoremen's direct action.

boom, some 15 years ago, at a time when the leading left theoreticians, such as Ernest Mandel, Michael Kidron and Paul Sweezy, expected capitalist prosperity to continue indefinitely.

But the same search for historical patterns becomes a fundamental fault in Marxism when the patterns are seen as rigid, objective laws, the "inevitable" path of development, about which we can be 100% certain. With such a view, the struggle for socialism no longer requires workers' self-consciousness and freedom. Socialism becomes a force outside of people which "the historical process" imposes on them. Socialist revolution ceases to be something that people do; it becomes something which happens to them.

This belief in the "inevitability of socialism" is not the only idea in the work of Marx, who constantly emphasized the growth of working class consciousness through mass struggles. But it is definitely there. For example, Marx *never* wrote that people should support socialism because it was morally better than capitalism, even though his writ-

ings were in fact filled with a moral fervor. Instead, he relied on objective forces to push people toward socialism.

Marxists have justified an enormous number of evils in the name of "inevitability." It has excused social democrats' support of imperialism. It has justified Stalin's murder of 20 million people. (After all, if socialism is inevitable and we — the Marxists — know this, why should we shrink from killing people who resist history and oppose the liberation of all humanity.) Marxists have supported nuclear bombs and nuclear power, the worst forms of opportunism and of sectarianism, the vilest lies, murders, and betrayals, for the sake of the supposedly inevitable "historical process."

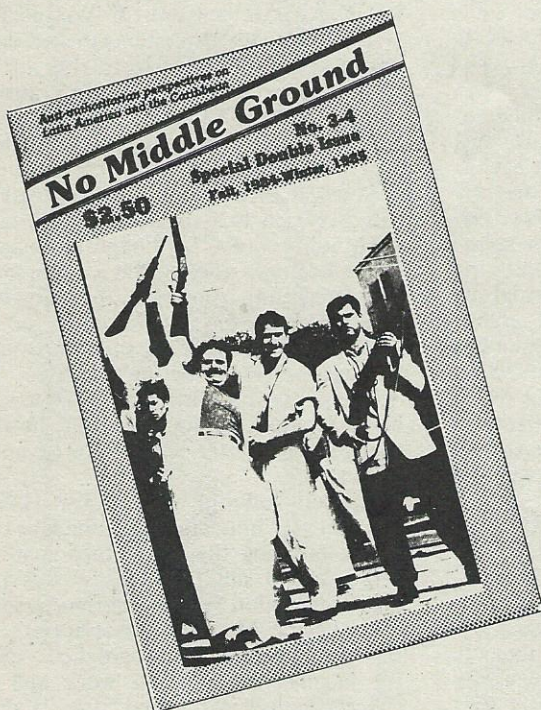
Events have demonstrated a thousandfold that Marx was right in saying that capitalism has tendencies toward self-destruction, and that the struggle for socialist freedom would continue, in spite of innumerable defeats. Yet the fact of these defeats, combined with the threat of nuclear war, make it impossible for reasonable people to say that socialism is inevitable or certain.

It is, we think, the very uncertainty of socialism which makes it necessary for the minority who believe in it to organize themselves into a party and fight for their ideas.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Anarchism

In many ways anarchism is the mirror image of Marxism. While Marxism's strengths and weaknesses are rooted in its search for social laws, the strengths and weaknesses of anarchism are rooted in its emphasis on *will*. Anarchism looks to the deliberate choice, the conscious decision, to be free.

At their best, anarchists worked to persuade working people that existing society was evil and oppressive and that a free society was both possible and desirable. Kropotkin wrote books on community planning which were attempts to demonstrate that a free, co-operative society was possible. His work often foreshadowed the current ecology movement and the alternate technology movement. Anarcho-synicalists (including the IWW in the



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U.S.) organized workers into unions that fought on bread-and-butter issues but remained uncompromisingly hostile to the capitalists. At the same time, they discussed ways that workers could organize society after a revolution.

The weaknesses of anarchism, however, are also a result of a onesided emphasis on will. The anarchists never made an analysis of how capitalism works which is remotely comparable to *Capital*. It is impossible to develop strategy and tactics for a movement unless we understand how the system functions and what our enemy is doing. Without a strategy and tactics, anarchists are reduced to raising an abstractly correct vision of a free society but not giving any guidelines as to how to achieve it. This becomes ultraleft sectarianism. When involved in real struggles, it becomes too easy to fall into opportunism, just because of a lack of a revolutionary strategy. This has happened repeatedly in the syndicalist movement, as in Spain in the 1930s.

The essential anarchist "strategy" was that at some point most working people would be persuaded of the anarchist vision. They would then make a revolution and immediately implement the whole anarchist goal of a society without a state, without repression, without money, and without any authority. But in every revolution which has ever happened (including the anarchist-influenced Spanish revolution of the '30s), there were counter-revolutionary armed forces, many workers and peasants who followed reformist and statist leaders, economic backwardness which could not instantly be turned into plenty for all, and other problems. The anarchist idea of an instant leap into the free communist society provides no strategic guidance as to how to deal with such problems.

The strengths and weaknesses of Marxism and anarchism can be made clearer by discussing three topics: the state, the party and general strategy.

The State

Our view of the state was originally based on Marx's writings on the Paris Commune of 1871 (*The Civil War in France*) and Lenin's *State and Revolution*. We believe that the anarchists are completely correct in saying that the existing capitalist state has to be smashed by working people. Contrary to the views of the social democrats or the

modern Communist parties, this state has been built to serve the interests of the capitalist class and can serve no others.

The anarchists are also right in opposing the formation of a new bureaucratic state, no matter how revolutionary or "working class" the new ruling party claims to be. The capitalist state should be replaced by an association of councils or committees representing workers, farmers, housewives, and other such groups. This was the original form of the "soviets" in Russia in 1917. The police and the army would be replaced by a militia system, which would be the armed people. So far we agree with the anarchists against 99% of those who call themselves Marxists.

Would this association of popular councils (with its own armed forces) be a new state? The anarchists answer "No." We answer "No — and yes."

It would not be a state in the old sense of a special body of officials and armed personnel separate from and over/against the workers. On the contrary, it would be nothing but the self-organization of the working people. When everyone participates in governing, then there is no "government" in the sense of a special organization.

Commenting on Marx's description of the Paris Commune, Lenin wrote:

"Thus the Commune appears to have replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall... Democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois democracy into proletarian democracy; from the state (a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer really the state."*

Lenin further quotes Engels as writing:

"The whole talk about the state should be dropped [from the party program], especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word... We should therefore propose to replace 'state' everywhere by the word 'community'..." Lenin immediately comments:

"What a howl about 'anarchism'!"

* *The State and Revolution*, Peking, 1973, p. 50; chap. III, 2.

would be raised by the leading lights of present-day 'Marxism'... if such rectification of the program were suggested to them!"

However, this association of councils (or "community" or "commune") would have some very definite state-functions, specifically that of repression. Our aim is to smash the capitalists' state and to take away their wealth and power. The capitalists and their agents are not going to like that, and need to organize to prevent them from taking it back. A popular militia will have to prevent counterrevolutionaries from organizing coups, to defeat invasions from imperialist countries, to root out spies and agents of these counterrevolutionary armies, and to prevent demoralized individuals from taking advantage of the confusion following a revolution by gangsterism.

For working people this will mean the greatest freedom ever, but to the capitalists it will be repression, the "dictatorship of the proletariat."

In relation to the anarchists, this may seem like a quibble over words, where we agree on the thing but are arguing over the name — semi-state or non-state. To some degree this is true. But our question for the anarchists is whether they agree that it will be necessary to organize repression of counter-revolutionaries after the revolution. If so, then the association of popular councils would be carrying out certain functions of a state. It could fairly be called a "council-state."

By contrast, almost all current Leninists and other Marxists reject the idea that the post-revolutionary organization should in any way *not* be a state. Our position on this happens to be the "orthodox" one held by Marx, Engels and Lenin. Those who regard a one-party dictatorship as the "workers' state" will no doubt attack us with a "howl about 'anarchism'."

The Party

Throughout the world, capitalist domination is organized by means of political parties: social democratic parties, Stalinist-Communist parties, liberal and conservative parties, fascist parties and so on. The anarchists draw the conclusion that we should oppose all political parties, whatever their program.

We draw the opposite conclusion. Since all the bad folks are organized, the good folks should also get organ-

ized. The minority which believes in libertarian socialism should get itself together and work as efficiently as possible to persuade working people of our ideas, to become the majority. As we have argued, our ideas will not win out automatically, "inevitably" or "spontaneously." They will win only if we work out a program and organize for it — in other words, build a serious political organization, that is, a party.

This requires "leadership," not in the sense of bureaucrats dictating to others, but simply that the libertarians should try to persuade the majority of working people to change their minds. It means a fight for "power": we want to persuade the millions of workers to organize themselves to take away the wealth and power of the capitalist class. But we do not want the small group of people in this room to replace the capitalists as rulers. Rather we want to participate in building a party of tens of thousands of working people, whose members would be in every shop, every office, every working class neighborhood. Its members would win leadership by being elected by the workers in mass organizations, such as unions or workers' councils, in competition with members of alternate parties. And they would lead the workers and other oppressed people in all phases of the struggle, up to and including an armed insurrection.

A multi-party democracy of workers' committees — rooted in the workplace — is not elitist. It is the self-organization of the working class and the oppressed. Nor is building a revolutionary party with this program elitist; it is part of the struggle for the self-organization of the working class.

Finally we will discuss revolutionary strategy and tactics, something which might come under the heading of the "united front."

The left usually oscillates between the two poles of opportunism and ultra-leftism. The dominant tendency, however, has been opportunism. For example, most of the U.S. left favors participating in the Democratic Party. In the upcoming [1984] election, they have persuaded themselves that the way to peace is to support the party which has begun every war since World War I!

Opportunists lie to the workers and try to manipulate people. They fawn on popular leaders who are pro-capitalist,

such as Jesse Jackson, and do not tell the workers what they actually believe, namely, that socialism (of some sort) is necessary. They hope to trick the workers into socialism, which fits with their elitist idea of socialism.

In reaction to the rottenness of opportunism, some of the best revolutionaries have often turned toward an ultra-left and ultimatumist program. They counterpose their program to the struggles of the oppressed. They call on the people to stop fighting for whatever they are fighting for and to take up a different struggle on a different basis. Otherwise they refuse to support the workers' struggles. They seek every opportunity to draw lines between themselves and the popular struggles, so they will not be opportunist. This too is elitist, in its attempt to dictate to the workers.

Marxism has certainly had its share of ultra-leftism, but its main tendency has been toward opportunism. Anarchism, with its emphasis on the revolutionary will, has tended toward ultra-leftism, although it too has had its opportunist betrayals.

In opposition to both opportunism and ultra-leftism, revolutionaries must find ways to participate in mass struggles, to participate *with others* who disagree, and to participate *as revolutionaries*. There is no "scientific" method that can show the way to do this. But we can make a commitment to find ways of participating in every struggle against the system, while we work within these movements for participatory socialism. There are no holy principles which can guarantee safety from opportunist mistakes: But in every movement we can try to tell the truth about the need for socialism in a way that does not counterpose our program to what people are fighting for.

This may be made clearer if we briefly discuss two areas, the national liberation movement in Central America and elections. The most important thing is not any particular "position," but the method: the attempt to bring the revolutionary program into mass struggles.

The Central American revolution

In Central America right now thousands of workers, peasants and others are fighting with arms against U.S. imperialism and its local agents. In the

U.S. many activists identify with these revolutions. Our program would be a failure if it had nothing to say to such revolutionaries.

Unfortunately, the leaders — the Sandinistas, the factions of the FDR-FMLN, the Guatemalan groups, and so on — are not libertarian socialists. Some of them are reformists, who want a more liberal, democratic capitalism. Others have a goal of a one-party state capitalism they call "socialism." All these leaders will betray the interests of the revolutionary people. What should our attitude be?

We start from an objective analysis of the situation. Following Lenin's theory of imperialism, we believe that the capitalist world is divided roughly into a few imperialist states and many oppressed nations. The U.S. is the main imperialist power in the world, far stronger than its main rival, the Soviet Union, and especially dominant in Central America. The struggle in Central America against the U.S. — whatever the leaders may think and whatever illusions the people have in their leaders — is truly a struggle against imperialism.

Therefore, we do not treat the two sides as we would in a war between two imperialisms. Inside the USA we are in *complete opposition* to its war against the Central American workers and peasants. We do not make proposals for better ways — slicker, less violent ways — to impose U.S. domination over Central America, as the liberals do. We demand the U.S. get out.

We have a different attitude toward the Central American side of the war. We do not condemn the Sandinistas or the FMLN because they are fighting against the imperialist U.S. On the contrary, *we are for this fight*. No, we condemn the existing leadership because it does not fight consistently and completely against capitalist imperialism. Their goal of a liberal-capitalist or state-capitalist Central America will not end the capitalist relations within the countries and will leave Central America subordinate to U.S. (and, to a lesser extent, Russian) imperialism — even if with a somewhat better deal.

Libertarian socialists in Central America should say to the workers and peasants: "We agree completely with your war against U.S. imperialism and its puppets. We join with you in this fight. We participate in your organiza-

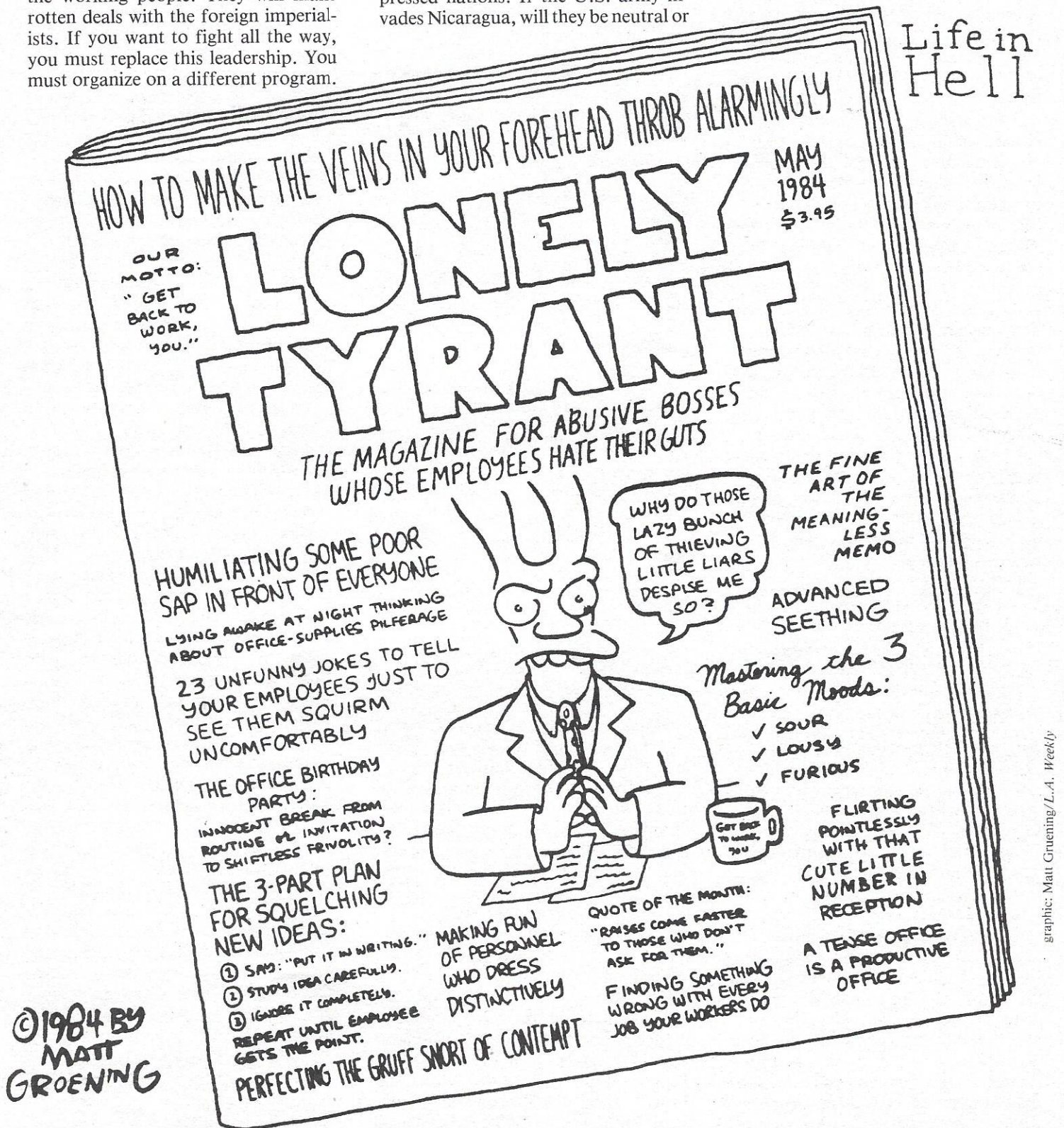
tions, in spite of our disagreements with their leaders. We support their military victory against the main enemy, U.S. imperialism. But we warn you that your leaders, because of their capitalist programs, will not fight all the way. They will recreate capitalist relations within the country, oppressing the working people. They will make rotten deals with the foreign imperialists. If you want to fight all the way, you must replace this leadership. You must organize on a different program.

We are ready to work with you toward this goal."

The Libertarian Workers Group does not agree with this approach, which they regard as giving in to the capitalist leadership. They must state clearly, then, where they stand in the war between the U.S. and the oppressed nations. If the U.S. army invades Nicaragua, will they be neutral or

will they support the military effort led by the Sandinistas (so long as we cannot persuade the people to remove them)? If the LWG would support the Nicaraguan army, then why not support them now against the U.S.-supplied *contras*, or earlier against the U.S. agent Somoza?

Life in Hell



Elections

We are in agreement with the anarchists against most of the Marxist left in our rejection of "electoralism" (or "parliamentarianism"). This is the belief that the system can be changed through elections. U.S. capitalist democracy was not built so that the workers could take capital away from the capitalists. It has nothing in common with a system of democratic workers' councils. The system was designed to help the capitalists in organizing their interests, making society-wide decisions, and bamboozling the workers. Any time it looks like the workers might elect a serious revolutionary party, the capitalists will cancel the elections and use military forces and fascist thugs against the workers, the way they did in Chile.

More specifically, we agree with anarchists that the Democratic Party has time and time again served to capture militant movements and housebreak them — as it did to the labor movement of the '30s, the Black movement of the '50s and '60s, and the anti-war movement of the '60s. This is a major job of the Democratic Party. Any participation in it is the kiss of death. The hopes of Blacks, Latins and women, of the unions and of the peace movement in the Democrats will be severely disappointed. Much of the left knows this

but keeps quiet. We say the truth now.

But separate from "electoralism" as a strategy is the tactic of using elections. We see nothing wrong with a revolutionary party running in elections or having its representatives sit in Congress as long as *it is made clear that we only use elections as a platform to expose the system*. We are told by anarchists that this would "legitimize" the electoral scam. Unfortunately, the electoral system is already "legitimate" in the minds of most U.S. workers, without our help. They believe in U.S. democracy, more or less. Once every two years their attention is focused on the elections as "politics." What on earth would be wrong with using these occasions to get attention for our revolutionary program?

More broadly, suppose the Black movement which now supports Jackson inside the Democratic Party were to split and form its own party. A movement of oppressed people would be breaking out of the limits of the two-party system which has been the backbone of U.S. capitalist politics. Should we stand outside and denounce it or should we consider participating in it — while openly opposing the liberal, electoral leadership of the new party?

Or suppose a new party was formed similar to the German Green Party, with thousands of people committed to libertarian ideas of decentralization,

regionalism, ecological planning and opposition to all nuclear bombs. Would we stand outside and denounce such a party, or would we consider joining that party — and raising our own perspective?

In such cases — an independent Black party, a "Green" party, or a labor party — to give up our program in order to be popular would be opportunist and self-defeating, because only participatory socialism can save humanity from destruction. But to stay outside those parties "on principle" would be sterile. It would abandon the militant ranks to the reformist leaders. Instead, we could say to the ranks of these movements, "We agree with what you want and will work with you for it. But we warn you that your leaders will not go all the way for it. They believe that the capitalist electoral system can be used for more than a platform, that it can be used to change the system in your interests. This is not true and blinds us in the face of our enemy. Let us work together to build a party on the program of revolutionary libertarian socialism."

Again, what matters is not the specific tactical decision, but a commitment to bring revolutionary politics into popular movements. We will make mistakes, but we will learn from them only if we make the effort.

— Wayne Price

Libertarian Workers Group Response

BY MIKE HARRIS

Welcome and many thanks to the RSL and the Libertarian Book Club for making this forum possible. The reason why the Libertarian Workers Group has decided to hold this discussion with the RSL is because the RSL consider themselves libertarian socialists and because of the need to develop a broader understanding of, as we say, "socialism from below," and of where anarchism with a small "a" and marxism with a small "m" meet, and, of course, where they differ.

The revolutionary movement is in a period of crisis. This crisis is a reflection of years of attempting to impose rigid concepts developed and meant for workers in far-off lands. Maoism of

the 1960s and '70s is a perfect example.

With the failure of this and other models — all rigid, contrived and divorced from the reality of the U.S. situation, I might add — the so-called revolutionary left has either physically disappeared, fallen further into sectarianism, "found out" that building a revolutionary movement, one with organic links to the working class, isn't as easy as a simple "right on" slogan (or quotes from the "holy books"), or slipped into reformism.

So, then, it's a breath of fresh air when we meet sincere comrades searching for a way to advance revolutionary ideas that agree with the libertarian ideas that agree with the libertarian ideas of **self-emancipation** and **self-organization**. As the LWG believes, it can

self-activity that a new world, a world without bosses, statism (of all kinds), hierarchy, sexism and racism can be brought about.

During the course of my talk I hope to highlight our areas of agreement with the RSL's marxism and our areas of disagreement. As all of you will see, I have left out or haven't addressed certain questions at length. This has been done on purpose so as to allow further discussions during the question and answer period. We feel it can only be through free discussion and debate, hopefully free of sectarianism and one-upmanship, that all those dedicated to free socialism, a libertarian socialism, can minimally come to some sort of theoretical agreement. Beyond that we are the creators of our own collective destiny.

Who's the LWG?

Now a little bit about ourselves. The LWG isn't what you would consider your average anarchist group. We're a

working class group. We follow in what we feel are the best traditions of working class "socialism from below." This tradition includes the revolutionary unionism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, or "traditional" anarcho-syndicalism. We also follow in the footsteps of the "wildcat" movements that arose both in the U.S. and Europe during the 1960s and '70s. And the autonomous working class movements that have developed and are continuing to develop throughout the world today.

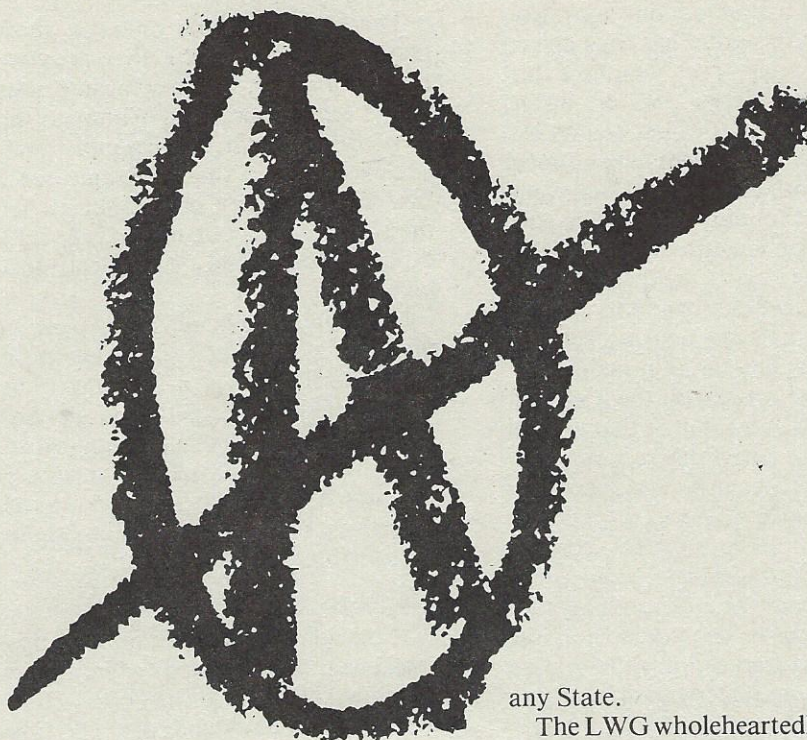
On our jobs and in the workers' movement in general we actively agitate for autonomous actions against our bosses and union bureaucrats.

Most of us have come out of the marxist left, and that may be why we are more willing than most anarchists to discuss this topic and move towards some form of unity with "libertarian marxists." Although each of our personal experiences with the marxist left is different, we have learned valuable lessons. It has not only solidified in our own minds the need to break with tired deterministic interpretations and monolithic organizational structures, but has also helped us to clarify our own views in regard to social and economic events and interpretations.

By the same token, we saw and still see the deficiencies in traditional marxism. Sometimes it is like watching the blind leading the blind, never learning from history yet constantly preaching the correctness of a particular brand of marxism.

Our synthesis of anarchism and marxism is as much an expression of two revolutionary currents as it is a way to find answers, tactics and alternative forms to the madness of everyday life.

Since the LWG was first launched in 1978, we have been active in trying to put this synthesis into practice. Admittedly, we are more anarchist than we are marxist. We don't follow blindly the writings of any one anarchist theoretician or activist. We have no "meccas." Our approach to such questions as "national liberation," elections, reforming the unions, reformist feminism, statism and partyism is negative. Negative in terms of using or participating in these movements and artificial creations as derailing the aims of a classless, non-oppressive and Stateless society. Our theory, methods and aims are interconnected and not separated from each other.



Agreements with marxism

Where do we agree with marxism, and in particular with the RSL's conception of marxism?

First and foremost, we agree with the basic marxian critique of capitalism. That is, capitalism, in whatever form it takes, is the primary institution for oppression. This, of course, doesn't negate all other forms of oppression nor do we see things in an entirely economic way.

We also believe that the emancipation of the working class can only be the task of the working class itself. Self-emancipation/self-organization is also the very framework from which anarchism derives its strength.

The early Marx's critique of everyday life and alienation is of special importance to us. There's near agreement by us with Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. We should also mention that the libertarian marxist "Situationists" expanded upon the latter, and their critique, although based on a somewhat traditional marxist interpretation, is no less valid. I should add, though, that the LWG does have some serious problems with the Situationists.

We also agree with libertarian and revolutionary marxists that there can be no integration of the revolutionary movement into the capitalist State. We'd take it a step further and say into

any State.

The LWG wholeheartedly believes in direct democracy and that no revolution can fulfill the goal of self-emancipation unless the people themselves *directly* control the vehicles they choose to carry out this process and in the process of building free socialism in the post-revolutionary period and beyond.

We also share with the RSL and other libertarians that the dominant "socialism" of today is State Capitalist; although our interpretations of when and how some countries became State Capitalist differ.

Like many libertarian marxists, we believe that the nationalization of the means of production is not the same as workers' self-management. We are *for* the direct control of the means of production and distribution as well as the use of technology and community affairs by the workers and community associations, be these organizations revolutionary unions, councils or other forms created and controlled by the workers and community residents themselves.

We agree with Rosa Luxemburg on the role of the mass strike. We do differ, however, on certain aspects of her interpretation of how this applies to workers' organizations. That is, unlike Luxemburg, we do not believe that any workers' organization should be subordinate to a political party, no matter what color that party may be.

The LWG would also tend to agree

with the RSL that libertarian trends have existed within marxian socialism, even though this point has been denied both by marxist and anarchist historians and activists. We do differ, however, as to what extent certain elements within that current have adopted libertarian principles out of convenience, that is, for aiding their own ends at a particular juncture in history. Yet that current exists and anarchists should try to find common ground with those marxists who accept and practice basic libertarian principles.

Finally, we agree with the RSL that the only type of revolution that will ensure a society based on freedom, solidarity and self-management is one that is international. History, we believe, has proven this assessment correct. There can be *no* socialism in one country! Common sense and a rudimentary understanding of economics and the brute force of repression should leave us with such an understanding.

Where do we differ?

For as many agreements as we may have with marxism in general and the RSL in particular, there are some major disagreements. Some of these are as much theoretical as they are tactical or programatic, while others may arise from historical misunderstandings or not so critical interpretations of some of the main socialist theorists and

leaders, Lenin in particular.

There seems to be amongst most marxists the belief that anarchists are *anti-democratic*. This is a misnomer as far as we're concerned. Although the LWG differs from, say, the individualist anarchists, we share the same belief that *parliamentary democracy* is not the same as direct democracy. (And I explained our views on direct democracy before.)

Originally, democracy meant rule by the poor who generally happen to be the majority. Later it was taken to mean general participation in government. Today it is normally applied to majority rule with legal parliamentary sanction. This concept is statist, and as anarchists we reject participating in electoral and statist politics.

Electoralism

This leads us to another point of disagreement, that is, participating in elections. This is a disagreement that stems from several concepts. The first is that it is impossible to make long-lasting and meaningful change through the electoral system. Whether you run as an "independent," "laborite" or "socialist," your chances of winning are quite slim. And even if you were to win, you'd still have to play by the capitalists' rules, since they and their professional bureaucrats control the apparatus.

Yet time and again we hear: "If the mass base exists then why not?" Good question indeed. I would venture to say that if a mass *socialist* base indeed existed, why, therefore, channel that base into the capitalist system? Is not that the same as derailing and integrating the socialist movement into the capitalist State apparatus, the same State the RSL programatically professes it wants to destroy?

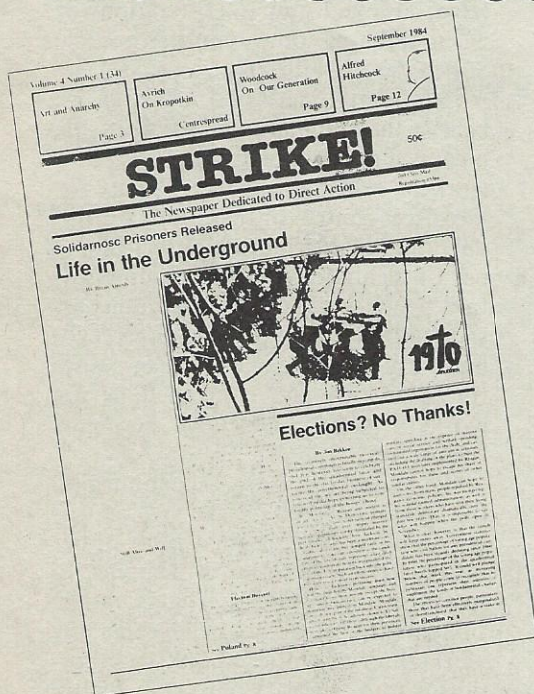
The mainstream left calls for this tactic, so how would your position differ? The Democratic Socialists of America follow this practice and where has that gotten all of us thus far? We understand that you can't wait for the millennium for changes to be made. We live in hard times, that's understood. But wouldn't it make more sense if mass movements used direct actions such as sit-ins, sit-downs, disruptions, occupations and so forth to make some headway?

And instead of relying on politicians (even "socialist" ones) to add a few cents more to welfare, why not begin to organize mutual aid societies? This is what people did for centuries and these alternatives to statist programs worked! We can't depend on the power-hungry politicians and bureaucratic legislative system forever. If we are to break with the ways of the past, then the revolutionary movement must offer alternatives. The tactics an organization employs must also reflect the goals that organization is trying to achieve.

National liberation

Another area where we disagree is that of, to use the RSL's words, "capitalist led" national liberation struggles.

Let me state from the start that although anarcho-syndicalists recognize cultural and ethnic differences and the subjugation of underdeveloped and developing countries to world imperialism, be it Eastern or Western, we totally reject the ideology of nationalism, be it bourgeois or "revolutionary" nationalism. As anarchists we *reject* the concept of the nation-State. As internationalists, we, as I said before, see true liberation of all people only coming about through world revolution and from movements that believe in the idea of "socialism from below." Aside from this, we find it hard to accept that revolutionaries would support all movements for national liberation "re-



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ardless of who is leading them" (to quote from an RSL pamphlet on this subject).

How can revolutionaries support those elements within the national liberation movements that seek to replace a foreign-imposed oppression with a more indigenous form of oppression? When you struggle for freedom, you struggle for just that. Why replace old bosses for new bosses? Isn't that counterposed to the RSL's belief that (and I quote): "*When oppressed masses fight for national liberation, they fight for freedom.*" To us, there still seems to be some more confusion here. On the one hand, there is blind support for middle class-led national liberation struggles, although the RSL would say critical support. On the other hand, the RSL says that the role of revolutionaries is to "*show that the middle class mislead-ers do not fight... for freedom...*" But when and how is this done? Before, during or after the struggle? You cannot have your feet in both camps.

You can't "*fight alongside the oppressed... without politically supporting the pro-capitalist leaders,*" as the RSL proposes. I would like to ask who controls the weapons and the political apparatus in such cases? The forces of real liberation or a new set of oppressors? The answer, as history has proven time and again, is only too obvious.

We don't think you have to give up supporting those who are engaged in life-or-death struggles. Rather, we believe that by supporting those elements that are libertarian in *spirit* and in *form* you are aiding the cause of self-emancipation. *There can be no middle ground!*

The State

Being that there can be no middle ground in the anti-imperialist arena, there can be no middle ground or confusion regarding the nature of the State. Here again we would disagree with the RSL.

Let's start with basics. We both agree that the primary organization of the revolutionary workers' movement will be the workers' council, or whatever autonomous form of class-based organization the workers freely choose in order to abolish capitalism and the existing State order. No disagreement here. Where we would then go our own way would be our theoretical influences, historical analysis and starting points. For the RSL, they choose to im-

plement the concept of the "council-State" as expounded by V.I. Lenin in *State and Revolution*. The LWG is neither Leninist nor Statist, and therefore our groups travel separate roads at this point. Some say it was Lenin who created the possibility for a reconciliation between revolutionary marxism and anarchism. We disagree wholeheartedly. At this point, let's just put the historical arguments aside for a moment and review why and how we differ with the council-State model proposed by Lenin and argued as an area of agreement by the RSL.

We *do not* agree with the concept that the revolutionary councils in the post-revolutionary period constitute a State, or that in a pre-revolutionary period these councils represent a pre-State formation. The State, as we see it, is a centralized institution, one whose functions are not merely administrative. The State, as opposed to a federalist and decentralized model, is an instrument by which a small elite and bureaucratic organization decides the fate of society as a whole. The State by its nature is bureaucratic. The State is a policeman that enforces its iron will by means of force and repression. This force and repression is not carried out by the popular and directly controlled organizations of the people, but by those professional and elite organizations that represent the interests of the ruling clique.

When Lenin wrote in *State and Revolution* that the administrative functions would be carried out by the council-State, did he mean that these functions would be decided directly, democratically and from below? And would such a practice be carried out immediately during and after the revolution? The answer is *no*. Lenin wrote that the "new" State would be merely "temporary." Instead of abolishing the State, the proletariat would need to replace it with one of their own.

Furthermore, Lenin and Marx saw the popular militias as being part of this transient State as well. That is, the councils would be administrative and the militias would implement the proletarian dictatorship.

We think that it's more than semantics to say that our concept of the administration of society is different from Lenin's. First off, history has shown that in reality the Leninist workers' councils were given secondary po-

sitions of power in regard to the economic transformation in Russia. The same held true of community councils. Our view is: only through the direct coordination of workers' councils and community councils will the mass of people be able to by-pass any sort of top-down and bureaucratic Statist organization. And, I might add, the State has always been modeled along top-down and bureaucratic lines. Our view is that all planning be decided on at the local, county, regional and national levels and that coordination be carried out by those organizations directly controlled by all affected. We would further argue that the State is not merely the agent of the dominant class (supposedly the workers in this case), but that the State bureaucracy and apparatus that it creates forms a class by itself and for itself. Therefore the State is the most powerful instrument of all by virtue of its monopoly of armed force and its sovereignty over all other social institutions. Again we must ask ourselves what incentive is given to those fulfilling State functions (or the myriad of institutions separate from and above the freely associated organizations) to allow itself to "wither away." The concept of the State simply "withering away" is an abstraction in and of itself.

Like that of the council-State, the concept of a proletarian dictatorship is misleading. Naturally we are in favor of the suppression of the counter-revolution. Would we risk our own lives just to hand society back to the reactionaries? I think not.

This question, again, is more than a matter of semantics. Dictatorships imply the rule of a central authority, one that suppresses liberty at its own will. If we allow for the creation of a centralized Statist bureaucracy — even temporarily — we also leave ourselves open for a small ruling elite to come to the fore to decide what is right and what is wrong, who's the counter-revolutionary and who's a friend of the people. It's no longer a matter of popular will but of the implementation of a minoritarian viewpoint carried out in the name of the people.

We would argue that as with the case of the workers' and community councils, control of the popular militias must remain firmly in the hands of those who belong to those militias. If

we allow a small political elite (the Party) to control the organizations for the defense of the revolution, then what you would call the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would become the dictatorship *over* the proletariat. The same would hold true for the economic and social organizations created by the people themselves. What should be further noted is that a State and *its* dictatorship are hierarchical institutions, that is, top-down structures, structures which leave little room for real proletarian discussion and the implementation of decisions freely decided upon by those directly involved. We believe that the libertarian socialist concept of cyclical decision-making and power is far better than that of a centralized and authoritarian command structure. Libertarian socialists believe that the free flow of power has neither a top nor a bottom.

In the future, we hope that we will have the opportunity to discuss some of the finer details of the social and economic organizations and their relationships in a self-managed society. Although there can be no detailed blueprint for the new society beforehand, I would like to say that any organizations created by the people themselves must be democratic and non-bureaucratic. All persons who are delegated with some special function should be immediately recalled when they do not carry out what they were chosen by co-workers and friends to do, and their tenure should be limited.

The transition period

Let me just briefly address the question of the "transition period." It's our view that society is always in transition. Every-day events transform old ideas into new, and the class battles and solutions are forever changing in style and intensity, some for the better, some for the worse. So, in one respect we can say that no change is ever defined by fine lines. Even after the revolution, society and the way we deal with the problems thereof will also always be changing. Thus all transitional phases are interconnected and the process is never really separated.

Since both our groups accept the idea of some sort of transition, we must look a little closer to see where we differ. For the LWG, we do not see such transition periods as being predicated by Statism or the party, no matter how

one wants to drape this Statism or Partyism. This concept implies that such transitions can only be decided by a select group of functionaries and that the organizational forms needed and roads taken must suit the needs of the State and the Party.

As we see it, there is no time period in the revolutionary process. It is hoped that the seeds of a new society would be already planted prior to the revolution, therefore eliminating many of the problems that most marxists argue require the development of a State to aid in the process of social transformation. The question is, then, who decides when the transition period is over? The Party, the State or the popular organizations? If there can be any case made against the concept of a transition period rigidly defined by the State, that would most certainly be Russia.

Sixty-seven years down the line the Russian Party hacks are still claiming that Russia isn't yet ready for a Stateless, communist society. That sure is a hell of a transition period! Transfer this to many other places in the world and you'll see that no other so-called "workers' States" have allowed their own workers to control society and eliminate the so-called transitional proletarian State. And, finally, we're highly dubious that Trotsky's ideas of a transitional period and State would have turned out much different *per se*.

The party

The question of revolutionary organization is important to both the LWG and the RSL. There's no doubt that conscious revolutionaries need political organizations that reflect their ideals. The RSL would ultimately like to see a political Party built. The LWG works towards building a national organization of associated individuals and commissions of activists who carry out our activities in the various movements of workers, women, minorities, sexually oppressed, anti-militarists and on and on.

We differ from a Party or the Party-type concept in the sense that we do not participate in elections. Nor do we see our organization and our members as the only leading organization or the leadership of the revolution and the new society. There are no central committees which command from above, nor is there the iron-clad discipline that must be followed by our members. We

feel that there can be no commander and no commanded. No separation between "leader" and militant.

A Party as we understand it (as seen through the eyes of historical experience) is a centralized and hierarchical organization. This is much different from the libertarian concept of self-organization from below. A Party operates under the rule of "democratic centralism" where there's no free flow of ideas and little if any room for minoritarian positions. Nor is there respect for those positions within an organization where a select group of individuals decide the fate of the organization and (after the revolution) society as a whole. There can be no direct and effective "base" democracy when power is centralized in the hands of a few. And on a procedural level, a Party and its divine belief in entrenched leaderships do not allow for the immediate recall of those serving "leadership" functions by the rank and file. Nor is there room for rotation of responsibilities. The "base" merely acts as the means for carrying out the policies of the leadership, therefore creating a separation between what should be mandated and advisory positions and bodies.

We are also critical of how Parties have tended to build themselves and not the autonomy of the class. Do workers' organizations, women's groups, racial minority groups take on forms and lives of their own, or are they supposed to be either subordinated to the Party or act as mere auxiliaries of the Party? We hope the former.

The RSL is interesting in the sense that they are a pre-Party formation (in the broadest sense of that term) which views itself more as an educational and agitational group, much the same as the LWG views itself. Then one must ask the \$1,000 question: Why call for the formation of a Party? Why not simply continue to act as a propaganda and agitational group? Or is leadership of the workers your primary goal? In which case we're opposed to that. Not that you need our approval of what your goals are, of course. Though, as I said before in regard to the national liberation question, you can't have your feet in both camps.

'The Good Fight': The Bad Film

As an anarchist, I am usually apprehensive about reading a book or seeing a film which purports to shed some light on such a divisive subject as the Spanish Civil War and Revolution. Historians usually have a particular axe to grind so it is important to look at a wide range of opinions and interpretations of all the events in order to formulate a clear understanding of them. For example, bourgeois liberals and Stalinists always portray the people rising in arms in Spain in the '30s as a "defense of a legally elected Republic," with little mention of the widespread collectivization in industry and agriculture and the accompanying social revolution.

It was with this in mind that I finally saw the new documentary of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, *The Good Fight*, and a co-feature called *To Die in Madrid*. The main reason I decided to see them was that I was bored and I was near the theatre.

Armed with my apprehension, I was not disappointed. Both films show how the people rose up to defend themselves from the fascist coup, but both state it was the support of the Republic that motivated the workers and peasants to fight back (the only time anyone ac-



Workers in arms in Spain, 1936. Fighting to replace capitalist exploitation with workers management of the economy, not to defend the pro-capitalist Republican government.

tually fought against fascism). The actual facts are a bit different.

The people of Spain had only recently been subjected to the proto-fascist dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and the Church in the late '20s, so they

knew what would be in store for them if the Francoist forces triumphed. The drive to fight the fascists was unnoticed by the Republic which refused to arm the people for their own defense when the coup began; it was *in spite* of the Republic that the people rose to defend their lives.

An annoying feature of both films was the glorification of the Republic of 1931. They comment on the historic legislation dividing the Church and State, but neglect to mention the continued strategic cooperation between the two which was aimed against the workers despite the verbal anti-clericalism of the Republicans. Also forgotten is the post-World War I era of the *pistoleros* (armed thugs of the bosses who were used to murder union organizers and agitators), as well as repressive acts of all sorts carried out in the '30s by Republican governments, such as the slaughter of the village of Casas Viejas by the "socialist" police.

Libertarian Workers Group...

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to say that although there are many disagreements between our two groups, there are many areas where mutual activities would not only be beneficial for the two groups, but also for the working class as well. As for the LWG, we invite all revolutionary and libertarian organizations to participate in mutually beneficial activities.

The areas where we feel joint work can be done are as follows:

- The building and defense of autonomous movements for socialism.
- The agitation for and the building of an autonomous and self-organized

workers' movement here in the U.S. and internationally.

- Mutual aid and solidarity with like-minded individuals struggling for peace and freedom.

- Developments of radical critiques of society and the dominant trend within the labor movement and transmitting those critiques through participation in selected mass movements.

- Mutual activity where we have *organic* ties to bring out, point to and discuss the libertarian form and spirit of those struggles.

Again, thanks for coming and I look forward to answering your questions. ■