

An Anarchist FAQ

Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's "*Marxism and Anarchism*"

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Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's "*Marxism and Anarchism*"

In issue no. 1714 of *Socialist Worker* (16th September 2000) the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) decided to expose anarchism in an article entitled "[*Marxism and Anarchism*](#)." However, their article is little more than a series of errors and distortions. We shall indicate how the SWP lies about anarchist ideas and discuss the **real** differences between anarchism and Marxism. Moreover, we will indicate that the bulk of the SWP's article just recycles common Leninist slanders about anarchism, slanders that have been refuted many times over.

1. What does the anti-globalisation movement tell us about the effectiveness of the "vanguard" parties like the SWP?

The inspiration for their diatribe is clear -- they are worried about anarchist influence in the various anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements and demonstrations which were then occurring across the world. As they put it:

"The great revolt against capitalism in Seattle last year, and similar demonstrations since, have attracted diverse groups of protesters. Anarchists, amongst others, have taken part in all of those protests."

Yes, indeed, anarchists have been involved in these demonstrations from the start, unlike "vanguard" parties like the SWP which only became aware of the significance of these movements once they exploded in the streets. That in itself should tell us something about the effectiveness of the Bolshevik inspired politics the SWP raise as an alternative to anarchism. Rather than being at the vanguard of these demonstrations and movements, parties like the SWP have been, post-Seattle, busy trying to catch up with them. Nor is this the only time this has happened.

In Russia, in February 1917, the Bolshevik party opposed the actions that produced the revolution which overthrew the Tsar. After weeks of strikes with police attacks on factories, the most oppressed part of the working class, the women textile workers, took the initiative. Demands for bread and attacks on bakeries were superseded by a massive demonstration of women workers on International Women's Day. The women had ignored a local Bolshevik directive to wait until May Day. The early slogan of "*Bread!*" was quickly followed by "*Down with the autocracy! Down with the war!*" By February 24th, half of Petrograd was on strike. The workers did go to their factories, not to work, but to hold meetings, pass resolutions and then go out to demonstrate. The Vyborg committee of the Bolsheviks opposed the strikes. Luckily for the Russian workers, and unfortunately for the Tsar, the Bolsheviks were ignored. If they had followed the Bolsheviks, the February Revolution would not have occurred.

The backward nature of the Bolshevik style of party can also be seen from events 12 years earlier. In 1905, workers spontaneously organised councils of workers' delegates ("soviets" in Russian). The soviets were based on workplaces electing recallable delegates to co-ordinate strikes and were created by the Russian workers themselves, independently of political parties.

Far from being at the vanguard of these developments the Bolsheviks were, in fact, deeply hostile to them. The Bolshevik Central Committee members in Petersburg were uneasy at the thought of a "*non-Party*" mass organisation existing side by side with their party. Instead of seeing the Soviet as a form of workers' self-organisation and self-activity (and so a key area for activity), they regarded it with hostility. They saw it as a rival to the party.

The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks organised a campaign against the Soviet due to its "*non-Party*" nature. They presented an ultimatum to the Soviet that it must place itself under the leadership of their party. On 24 October they had moved a resolution along the same lines in meetings at the various factories, demanding that the Soviet accept the Social Democratic programme and tactics, demanding that it must define its political stance.

The Bolshevik Central Committee then published a resolution, that was binding upon all Bolsheviks throughout Russia, insisting that the soviets must accept the party programme. Agitation against the soviet continued. On 29 October, the Bolshevik's Nevsky district committee declared it was inadmissible for Social Democrats to participate in any kind of "*workers' parliament*" like the Soviet.

The Bolshevik argument was that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies should not have existed as a political organisation and that the social democrats must withdraw from it, since its existence acted negatively upon the development of the social democratic movement. The Soviet of Delegates could remain as a trade union organisation, or not at all. Indeed, the Bolsheviks presented the Soviet with an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the Bolsheviks or else disband! The Bolshevik leaders justified their hostility to the Soviet on the grounds that it represented "*the subordination of consciousness to spontaneity*" -- in this they followed Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?**. When they moved their ultimatum in the Soviet it was turned down and the Bolshevik delegates, led by the Central Committee members, walked out. The other delegates merely shrugged their shoulders and proceeded to the next point on the agenda.

If workers had followed the Bolsheviks the 1905 revolution would not have occurred and the first major experience of workers' councils would never have happened. Rather than being in favour of working class self-management and power, the Bolsheviks saw revolution in terms of party power. This confusion remained during and after 1917 when the Bolsheviks finally supported the soviets (although purely as a means of ensuring a Bolshevik government).

Similarly, during the British Poll Tax rebellion of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the SWP dismissed the community based mass non-payment campaign. Instead they argued for workers to push their trade unions leadership to call strikes to overthrow the tax. Indeed, they even argued that there was a "*danger that community politics divert people from the means to won, from the need to mobilise working class activity on a collective basis*" by which they meant trade union basis. They argued that the state machine would "*wear down community resistance if it cannot tap the strength of the working class.*" [quoted by Trotwatch, **Carry on Recruiting!**, pp. 29-30] Of course it goes without saying that the aim of the community-based non-payment campaign was working class activity on a collective basis. This explains the creation of anti-poll tax unions, organising demonstrations, occupations of sheriff officers and bailiffs offices as well as council buildings, the attempts to stop warrant sales by direct action, the attempts to create links with rank-and-file trade unionists and so on. Indeed, the SWP's strategy meant mobilising **fewer** people in collective struggle as trade union members were a minority of those affected by the tax as well as automatically excluding those workers

not in unions, people who were unemployed, housewives, students and so on. Little wonder the SWP failed to make much of an impact in the campaign.

However, once non-payment began in earnest and showed hundreds of thousands involved and refusing to pay, overnight the SWP became passionate believers in the collective class power of community based non-payment. They argued, in direct contradiction to their earlier analysis, that the state was "*shaken by the continuing huge scale of non-payment.*" [quoted by Trotwatch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

The SWP proved to be totally unresponsive to new forms of struggle and organisation produced by working class people when resisting the government. In this they followed the Bolshevik tradition closely -- the Bolsheviks initially ignored the soviets created during the 1905 Russian Revolution and then asked them to disband. They only recognised their importance in 1917, 12 years after that revolution was defeated and the soviets had re-appeared.

So, the fact that the self-proclaimed "vanguard of the proletariat" is actually far behind the struggle comes as no surprise. Nor are their slanders against those, like anarchists, who are at the front of the struggle unsurprising. They produced similar articles during the poll tax rebellion as well, to counter anarchist influence by smearing our ideas.

2. What does the SWP miss out in its definition of anarchism?

The SWP continue: "*Anarchism is generally taken to mean a rejection of all authority.*"

One question immediately arises. What do anarchists mean by the term "*authority*"? Without knowing that, it will be difficult to evaluate the SWP's arguments.

Kropotkin provides the answer. He argued that "*the origin of the anarchist inception of society*" lies in "*the criticism . . . of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and . . . the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind.*" He stresses that anarchism "*refuses all hierarchical organisation.*" [**Anarchism**, p. 158 and p. 137]

Thus anarchism rejects authority in the sense, to use Malatesta's words, of "*the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands a few.*" [**Anarchy**, p. 40] Once this is clearly understood, it will quickly be seen that the SWP create a straw man to defeat in argument.

Moreover, by concentrating on what anarchism is **against** the SWP can ignore what anarchism is **for**. This is important as to discuss the positive ideas of anarchism would mean having to discuss anarchists ideas on organisation, why we oppose centralisation, favour federalism as a means of co-ordinating decisions, why we propose self-management in place of government, and so on. To do this would mean accurately presenting libertarian theory rather than a just series of slanders, which, of course, the SWP would hate to do.

So what is anarchism for?

Anarchism derives from the Greek for "**without authority**" or "**without rulers**" and this informs anarchist theory and visions of a better world. This means that anarchism is against the "*domination of man by man*" (and woman by woman, woman by man, and so on). However, "*[a]s knowledge has penetrated the governed masses . . . the people have revolted against the form of authority then felt most intolerable. This spirit of revolt in the individual and the masses, is the natural and necessary fruit of the spirit of domination; the vindication of human dignity, and the saviour of social life.*" Thus "*freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association.*" [Charlotte Wilson, **Anarchist Essays**, p. 54 and p. 40] In other words, anarchist comes from the struggle of the oppressed against their rulers and is an expression of individual and social freedom. Anarchism was born from the class struggle.

This means, positively, that anarchists stress the need for **self-government** (often called **self-management**) of both individuals and groups. Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domination can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed (i.e. end hierarchy). In other words, those affected by a decision make that decision. Anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality and so all forms of hierarchical organisation (such as the state and the capitalist workplace) and authoritarian social relationship (such as sexism, racism, homophobia and wage labour) must be abolished. This means that anarchist organisations must be self-managed, decentralised and based on federalism. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create a society of free and equal individuals.

This is why anarchists stress such things as decision making by mass assemblies and the co-ordination of decisions by mandated and recallable delegates. The federal structure which unites these basic assemblies would allow local affairs to be decided upon locally and directly, with wider issues discussed and decided upon at their appropriate level and by all involved. This would allow those affected by a decision to have a say in it, so allowing them to manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy. This, in turn, would encourage the self-reliance, self-confidence and initiative of those involved. As a necessary complement of our opposition to authority is support for **direct action**. This means that people, rather than looking to leaders or politicians to act for them, look to themselves and the own individual and collective strength to solve their own problems. This also encourages self-liberation, self-reliance and self-confidence as the prevailing culture would be "*if we want something sorted out, we have to do it ourselves*" -- in other words, a "*do it yourself*" mentality.

Therefore, the **positive** side of anarchism (which naturally flows from its opposition to authority) results in a political theory which argues that people must control their own struggles, organisations and affairs directly. This means we support mass assemblies and their federation via councils of mandated delegates subject to recall if they break their mandates (i.e. they act as they see fit, i.e. as politicians or bureaucrats, and not as the people who elected them desire). This way people directly govern themselves and control their own lives. It means we oppose the state and support free federations of self-governing associations and communes. It means we oppose capitalism and support workers' self-management. It means we reject hierarchy, centralism and authoritarian structures and argue for self-managed organisations, built from the bottom up and always accountable to the base. It means we consider the direct control of struggles and movements by those involved as not only essential in the here and now but also essential training for living in a free, libertarian

socialist society (for example, workers direct and total control of their strikes and unions trains them to control their workplaces and communities during and after the revolution). It means we oppose hierarchy in all its forms and support free association of equals. In other words, anarchism can generally be taken to mean support for self-government or self-management.

By discussing only the negative side of anarchism, by missing out what kinds of authority anarchists oppose, the SWP ensure that these aspects of our ideas are not mentioned in their article. For good reason as it puts Marxism in a bad light.

3. Why does mentioning the history of anarchism weaken the SWP's argument?

The SWP correctly argue that we *"live in a world of bullying line managers, petty school rules, oppressive police, and governments that serve the rich and powerful."* However, they trivialise anarchism (and the natural feelings that result from such domination) by stating *"[e]veryone who hates that has, at least at times, felt a streak of 'anarchist' revolt against authority."* Thus anarchism is presented as an emotional response rather than as valid, coherent intellectual opposition to the state, wage labour, inequality and hierarchical authority in general. But, of course, anarchism is more than this, as the SWP acknowledge:

"Anarchism, however, is more than a personal reaction against the tyrannies of capitalism. It is a set of political beliefs which have been held up as an alternative to the revolutionary socialist ideas of Karl Marx. Anarchist ideas have, on occasion, had a mass influence on movements against capitalism."

Given that the *"revolutionary socialist ideas"* of Marx have been proven wrong on numerous occasions while Bakunin's predictions were proven right, anarchists humbly suggest that anarchism is a valid alternative to Marxism. For example, Bakunin correctly predicted that when *"the workers . . . send common workers . . . to Legislative Assemblies . . . The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois . . . For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 108] The history of the Marxist Social Democratic Parties across the world proved him right.

Similarly, Bakunin predicted that Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat" would become the "dictatorship over the proletariat." As discussed in [section H.6](#), the experience of the Russian Revolution proved him correct -- once the Bolshevik party had become the government, power became centralised at the top, the workers' soviets quickly became a cog in the state machinery rubber-stamping the decrees of the Bolshevik government, workers' control of production by factory committees was replaced by state appointed managers and so on. The "socialist" state quickly became a bureaucratic monster without real control from below (indeed, the Bolsheviks actually disbanded soviets when opposition parties won a majority in them at the start of 1918). The start of the Civil War in May 1918 just made things worse.

The SWP continue by arguing:

"Socialists and anarchists share a hatred of capitalism. They have often fought alongside each other in major battles against the capitalist system. They struggled together in the Europe-wide mass strikes at the end of the First World War and the inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936, as well as in countless smaller battles today."

Which is true. They also fail to mention that the mass-strikes at the end of the First World War were defeated by the actions of the Social-Democratic Parties and trade unions. These parties were self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist organisations, utilising (as Marx had argued) the ballot box and centralised organisations. Unsurprisingly, given the tactics and structure, reformism and bureaucracy had developed within them. When workers took strike action, even occupying their factories in Italy, the bureaucracy of the Social Democratic Parties and trade unions acted to undermine the struggle, isolating workers and supporting capitalism. Indeed, the German Social Democratic Party (which was, pre-1914, considered the jewel in the crown of Marxism and the best means to refute the anarchist critique of Marxist tactics) actually organised an alliance with the right-wing para-military Freikorps to violently suppress the revolution. The Marxist movement had degenerated into bourgeois parties, as Bakunin predicted.

It is also strange that the SWP mention the *"inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936"* as this revolution was mainly anarchist in its *"inspiring"* features. As discussed in [section I.8](#), workers took over workplaces and the land, organising them under workers' self-management. Direct democracy was practised by hundreds of thousands of workers in line with the organisational structures of the syndicalist union the C.N.T. In contrast, the Russian Revolution saw power become centralised into the hands of the Bolshevik party leadership and workers' self-management of production was eliminated in favour of one-man management imposed from above (see M. Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details).

4. How is the SWP wrong about centralisation?

The SWP continue by arguing that *"there are differences between revolutionary socialism and anarchism. Both understand the need for organisation but disagree over what form that organisation takes."* This is a vast step forward in the usual Marxist slander that anarchists reject the need for organisation and so should be welcomed. Unfortunately the rest of the discussion on this issue falls back into the usual swamp of slander.

They argue that *"[e]very struggle, from a local campaign against housing privatisation to a mass strike of millions of workers, raises the need for organisation. People come together and need mechanisms for deciding what to do and how to do it."* They continue by arguing that *"Anarchism says that organisation has nothing to do with centralisation. For anarchism, any form of centralisation is a type of authority, which is oppressive."*

This is true, anarchists do argue that centralisation places power at the centre, so disempowering the people at the base of an organisation. In order to co-ordinate activity anarchists propose federal structures, made up on mandated delegates from autonomous assemblies. In this way, co-ordination is achieved while ensuring that power remains at the bottom of the organisation, in the hands of those actually fighting or doing the work. Federalism does not deny the need to make agreements and to co-ordinate decisions. Far from it -- it was put forward by anarchists precisely to ensure co-ordination of joint activity

and to make agreements in such a way as to involve those subject to those decisions in the process of making them. Federalism **involves** people in managing their own affairs and so they develop their initiative, self-reliance, judgement and spirit of revolt so that they can **act** intelligently, quickly and autonomously during a crisis or revolutionary moment and show solidarity as and when required instead of waiting for commands from above as occurs with centralised movements. In other words, federalism is the means to combine participation and co-ordination and to create an organisation run from the bottom up rather than the top-down. As can be seen, anarchists do not oppose co-ordination and co-operation, making agreements and implementing them together.

After mentioning centralisation, the SWP make a massive jump of logic and assert:

"But arguing with someone to join a struggle, and trying to put forward tactics and ideas that can take it forward are attempts to lead.

"It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place. We always need to take the best ideas and act on them in a united way."

Placing ideas before a group of people is a "lead" but it is not centralisation. Moreover, anarchists are not against making agreements! Far from it. The aim of federal organisation is to make agreements, to co-ordinate struggles and activities. This does not mean ignoring agreements. As Kropotkin argued, the commune *"cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the C.N.T.'s resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that *"the foundation of this administration will be the Commune. These Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the purpose of achieving goals of a general nature. The right of autonomy is not to preclude the duty of implementation of agreements regarding collective benefits."* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 68] In the words of Malatesta:

"But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one's own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting . . . it is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative." [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 86-7]

Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory and principles. Rather, we see such co-operation and co-ordination, generated from below upwards, as an essential means of exercising and protecting freedom.

The SWP's comment against anarchism is a typical Marxist position. The assumption seems to be that "centralisation" or "centralism" equals co-ordination and, because we reject centralisation, anarchists must reject co-ordination, planning and agreements. However, in actuality, anarchists have always stressed the need for federalism to co-ordinate joint activities, stressing that decision-making and organisation must flow from below upwards so

that the mass of the population can manage their own affairs directly (i.e. practice self-management and so anarchy). Unfortunately, the SWP fail to acknowledge this, instead asserting we are against co-operation, co-ordination and making agreements.

In this the SWP are following in a long-line of Marxist inventions. For example, Engels asserted in his infamous diatribe *"The Bakuninists at work"* that Bakunin "[a]s early as September 1870 (in his **Lettres à un français**) . . . had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own." For Engels anarchist federalism "consisted precisely in the fact that each town acted on its own, declaring that the important thing was not co-operation with other towns but separation from them, this precluding any possibility of a combined attack." [**Marx-Engels Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 592]

Engels had conveniently forgotten having read in Bakunin's pamphlet the necessity "to return the initiative of action to all the revolutionary communes of France, freed from all centralising government and all tutelage, and consequently called upon to form a new organisation by federating amongst themselves for defence." ["*Lettres à un Français sur la crise actuelle*", **Oeuvres**, Tome II, p. 85]

So, in reality, the truth is totally different. Bakunin does, of course, reject "centralised leadership" as it would be "necessarily very circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life." However, it is a falsehood to state that he denies the need for co-ordination of struggles and federal organisation from the bottom up in that or any other work. As he puts it, the revolution must "foster the self-organisation of the masses into autonomous bodies, federated from the bottom upwards." With regards to the peasants, he thinks they will "come to an understanding, and form some kind of organisation . . . to further their mutual interests . . . the necessity to defend their homes, their families, and their own lives against unforeseen attack . . . will undoubtedly soon compel them to contract new and mutually suitable arrangements." The peasants would be "freely organised from the bottom up." ["*Letters to a Frenchman*", **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 196, p. 206 and p. 207] In this he repeated his earlier arguments concerning social revolution -- positions that Engels was well aware of, just as he was well aware of the argument for the necessity of a federated defence by Bakunin in his "*Letters to a Frenchman*." In other words, Engels deliberately lied about Bakunin's political ideas. It appears that the SWP is simply following the Marxist tradition in their article.

5. Why does the SWP's "*picket line is 'authoritarian'*" argument totally miss the point?

The SWP continue by arguing:

"Not all authority is bad. A picket line is 'authoritarian.' It tries to impose the will of the striking workers on the boss, the police and on any workers who may be conned into scabbing on the strike."

What should strike the reader about this example is its total lack of class analysis. In this the SWP follow Engels (for more discussion, see [section H.4](#)). In his essay **On Authority**,

Engels argues that a *"revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon-authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror its arms inspire in the reactionaries."* [**The Marx-Engels Reader**, p. 733]

However, such an analysis is without a class basis and so will, by necessity, mislead the writer and the reader. Engels argues that revolution is the imposition by *"one part of the population"* on another. Very true -- but Engels fails to indicate the nature of class society and, therefore, of a social revolution. In a class society *"one part of the population"* constantly *"imposes its will upon the other part"* all the time. In other words, the ruling class imposes its will on the working class everyday in work by the hierarchical structure of the workplace and in society by the state. Discussing the *"population"* as if it was not divided by classes, and so subject to specific forms of authoritarian social relationships, is liberal nonsense. Once we recognise that the *"population"* in question is divided into classes we can easily see the fallacy of Engels argument. In a social revolution, the act of revolution is the overthrow of the power and authority of an oppressing and exploiting class by those subject to that oppression and exploitation. In other words, it is an act of liberation in which the hierarchical power of the few over the many is eliminated and replaced by the freedom of the many to control their own lives. It is hardly authoritarian to destroy authority! Thus a social revolution is, fundamentally, an act of liberation for the oppressed who act in their own interests to end the system in which *"one part of population imposes its will upon the other"* everyday.

This applies equally to the SWP's example of a picket line. Is a picket line really authoritarian because it tries to impose its will on the boss, police or scabs? Rather, is it not defending the workers' freedom against the authoritarian power of the boss and their lackeys (the police and scabs)? Is it *"authoritarian"* to resist authority and create a structure -- a strike assembly and picket line -- which allows the formally subordinated workers to manage their own affairs directly and without bosses? Is it *"authoritarian"* to combat the authority of the boss, to proclaim your freedom and exercise it? Of course not. The SWP are playing with words.

Needless to say, it is a large jump from the "authority" of a strikers' assembly to that of a highly centralised "workers' state" but that, of course, is what the SWP wish the reader to do. Comparing a strikers' assembly and picket line -- which is a form of self-managed association -- with a state cannot be done. It fails to recognise the fundamental difference. In the strikers' assembly and picket line the strikers themselves decide policy and do not delegate power away. In a state, power is delegated into the hands of a few who then use that power as they see fit. This by necessity disempowers those at the base, who are turned into mere electors and order takers. Such a situation can only spell death of a social revolution, which requires the active participation of all if it is to succeed. It also exposes the central fallacy of Marxism, namely that it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation -- centralisation -- that precludes that participation.

6. Why are the SWP's examples of *"state functions"* wrong?

The SWP continue their diatribe against anarchism:

"Big workers' struggles throw up an alternative form of authority to the capitalist state. Militant mass strikes throw up workers' councils. These are democratic bodies, like strike committees. But they take on organising 'state functions' -- transport, food distribution, defence of picket lines and workers' areas from the police and army, and so on."

To state the obvious, transportation and food distribution are not *"state functions."* They are economic functions. Similarly, defence is not a *"state function"* as such -- after all, individuals and communities can and do defend themselves against aggression, strikers organise themselves to defend themselves against cops and hired strike breakers, and so on. This means that defence can be organised in a **libertarian** fashion, directly by those involved and based on self-managed workers' militias and federations of free communes. It need not be the work of a state nor need it be organised in a statist (i.e. hierarchical) fashion like, for example, the current bourgeois state and military or the Bolshevik Red Army (where the election of officers, soldiers' councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above). So "defence" is **not** a state function.

As Kropotkin, for example, noted that the anarchist *"idea of independent Communes for the territorial groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings by social functions"* in *"a liberated society"* would *"allow the satisfaction of all social needs"* including *"mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence"*, amongst other things. [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, pp. 164-5] While the state has, undoubtedly, tried to monopolise defence of the territory (along with other social functions), it does not mean that this is necessarily a state function. Anarchists, then, reject the notion that defence of a revolution or a classless society equates to a state for *"the practice of mutual aid"* allows the people *"to ally, to unite . . . for purpose of defence, to federate"* [Kropotkin, *Anarchy: Its philosophy, Its ideal*", **Op. Cit.**, p. 477] As noted in [section H.2.1](#), if we take the SWP's claims seriously then we would have to conclude that Engels was wrong to proclaim the Native American Iroquois Confederacy as knowing no state even if it had, like an anarchist society would, a federal council and waged war by means of volunteers.

Likewise, if *"transport, food distribution"* and so on **are** *"state functions"*, how are they to be provided if, as Marxists promise, the state eventually (to use Engels' famous expression) *"withers away"*? As such, in their rush to mock anarchism they forget an allegedly key aspect of their own ideology. Unfortunately, if they proclaim that the associated producers will provide them then their critique of anarchism falls for that is precisely the anarchist answer -- we simply recognise that this must be part of the revolutionary struggle rather than postponed to a distant future (if it arrives at all).

In other words, what the SWP consider to be "state functions" -- *"transport, food distribution, defence of picket lines and workers' areas from the police and army, and so on"* -- are actually social functions best organised by the associated and federated workers and their organisations, not some centralised body above them like a state. Indeed, as regards transport and food distribution, these are already done by workers themselves albeit under the control of bosses, a control that must be ended and replaced by workers' self-management as an essential part of a revolution,

What is a *"state function"* is imposing the will of a minority -- the government, the boss, the bureaucrat -- onto the population via professional bodies such as the police and military. This is what the Bolshevik state did, with workers' councils turned into state bodies executing the

decrees of the government and using a specialised and hierarchical army and police force to do so. The difference is important. Luigi Fabbri sums up it well:

"The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists . . . as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.

*"Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and . . . if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle." ["Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", pp. 13-45, **Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution**, Friends of Aron Baron (ed.), pp. 26-7]*

Thus the difference between anarchists and Leninists is not whether the organisations workers' create in struggle will be the framework of a free society (or the basis of the Commune). Indeed, anarchists have been arguing this for longer than Marxists have. The difference is whether these organisations remain self-managed or whether they become part of a centralised state. In the words of Camillo Berneri:

*"Marxists . . . foresee the natural extinction of the State as a consequence of the destruction of the classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State socialism, whereas anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which suppresses, with classes, the State. Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the commune by the whole proletariat, but rather the conquest of the State by the party which presumes to represent the proletariat. Anarchists accept the use of political power by the proletariat, but this political power is understood as [being formed by] the entire corpus of communist management systems - trade union organisations, communal institutions, both regional and national - freely constituted outside and against the political monopoly of a party and aiming at minimal administrative centralisation." ["Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism", **The State - Or Revolution**, p. 100]*

So, anarchists agree, in "*big workers' struggles*" organisation is essential and can form an alternative to the capitalist state. However, such a framework only becomes an "authority" when power is transferred from the base into the hands of an executive committee at the top. Strike and community assemblies, by being organs of self-management, are not an "authority" in the same sense that the state is or the boss is. Rather, they are the means by which people can manage their own struggles (and so affairs) directly, to govern themselves and so do without the need for hierarchical authority.

The SWP, in other words, confuse two very different things.

7. What is ironic about the SWP's comment that workers' councils must "*break up*" the capitalist state?

After misunderstanding basic concepts, the SWP treat us to a history lesson:

"Such councils were a feature of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German Revolution after the First World War, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, and many other great struggles. Socialists argue that these democratic workers' organisations need to take power from the capitalists and break up their state."

Anarchists agree. Indeed, they argued that workers' organisations should "*break up*" and replace the state long before Lenin discovered this in 1917. For example, Bakunin argued in the late 1860s that the International Workers' Association, an "*international organisation of workers' associations from all countries*", would "*be able to take the revolution into its own hands*" and be "*capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie.*" The "*natural organisation of the masses*" was "*organisation by trade association,*" in other words, by unions, "*from the bottom up.*" The means of creating socialism would be "*emancipation through practical action . . . workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means trades unions, organisation*" The very process of struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers' councils, as "*strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers . . . each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups.*" He stresses the International was a product of the class war as it "*has not created the war between the exploiter and the exploited; rather, the requirements of that war have created the International.*" Thus the seeds of the future society are created by the class struggle, by the needs of workers to organise themselves to resist the boss and the state. [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 110, p. 139, p. 103 and p. 150]

He stressed that the revolution would be based on federations of workers' associations, in other words, workers' councils:

"the federative alliance of all working men's associations . . . [will] constitute the Commune . . . [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of . . . delegates . . . vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates. . . all provinces, communes and associations . . . by first reorganising on revolutionary lines . . . [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction . . . [and for] self-defence . . . [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation. . ." [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, pp. 170-2]

And:

"The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 206]

Thus it is somewhat ironic to have Leninists present basic anarchist ideas as if they had thought of them first.

Then again, the ability of the Marxists to steal anarchist ideas and claim them as their own is well known. They even rewrite history to do so. For example, the SWP's John Rees in the essay *"In Defence of October"* argues that *"since Marx's writings on the Paris Commune"* a *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* was *"that the soviet is a superior form of democracy because it unifies political and economic power."* [**International Socialism**, no. 52, p. 25] Nothing could be further from the truth, as Marx's writings on the Paris Commune prove.

The Paris Commune, as Marx himself argued, was *"formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town."* [*"The Civil War in France"*, **Selected Works**, p. 287] As Marx made clear, it was definitely **not** based on delegates from workplaces and so could **not** unify political and economic power. Indeed, to state that the Paris Commune was a soviet is simply a joke, as is the claim that Marxists supported soviets as revolutionary organs to smash and replace the state from 1871. In fact Marxists did not subscribe to this *"cornerstone of revolutionary theory"* until 1917 when Lenin argued that the Soviets would be the best means of ensuring a Bolshevik government.

Indeed the **only** political movement which took the position Rees falsely ascribes to Marxism was anarchism. This can be clearly seen from Bakunin's works. Moreover, Bakunin's position dates, we must stress, from **before** the Paris Commune. This position has been argued by revolutionary anarchists ever since -- decades before Marxists did.

Similarly, Rees argues that *"the socialist revolution must counterpose the soviet to parliament . . . because it needs an organ which combines economic power -- the power to strike and take control of the workplaces -- with an insurrectionary bid for political power, breaking the old state."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 25] However, he is just repeating anarchist arguments made decades before Lenin's temporary conversion to the soviets. In the words of the anarchist Jura Federation (written in 1880):

"The bourgeoisie's power over the popular masses springs from economic privileges, political domination and the enshrining of such privileges in the laws. So we must strike at the wellsprings of bourgeois power, as well as its various manifestations.

"The following measures strike us as essential to the welfare of the revolution, every bit as much as armed struggle against its enemies:

"The insurgents must confiscate social capital, landed estates, mines, housing, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, gems and precious stones and manufactured products:

"All political, administrative and judicial authorities are to be abolished . . . What should the organisational measures of the revolution be?

"Immediate and spontaneous establishment of trade bodies: provisional assumption by those of . . . social capital . . . : local federation of a trades bodies and labour organisation:

"Establishment of neighbourhood groups and federations of same . . . [T]he federation of all the revolutionary forces of the insurgent Communes . . . Federation of Communes and organisation of the masses, with an eye to the revolution's enduring until such time as all reactionary activity has been completely eradicated . . . Once trade bodies have been established, the next step is to organise local life. The organ of this life is to be the federation of trades bodies and it is this local federation which is to constitute the future Commune." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 246-7]

As can be seen, long before Lenin's turn towards the soviets as a means of the Bolsheviks taking power, **anarchists**, not Marxists, had argued that we must counterpose the council of workers' delegates (by trade in the case of the Jura federation, by workplace in the case of the later anarcho-syndicalist unions and the soviets). Anarchists clearly saw that, to quote Bakunin, "*[n]o revolution could succeed . . . today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141] Unlike Marx, who clearly saw a political revolution (the conquest of state power) coming **before** the economic transformation of society ("*The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes and therefore of class-rule.*" [Marx, **Op. Cit.**, p. 290]). This is why anarchists saw the social revolution in terms of economic and social organisation and action as its first steps were to eliminate both capitalism and the state.

Rees, in other words, is simply stating anarchist theory as if Marxists have been arguing the same thing since 1871.

Moreover, anarchists predicted other ideas that Marx took from the experience of the Paris Commune. Marx praised the fact that each delegate to the Commune was "*at any time revocable and bound by the **mandat impératif** (formal instructions) of his constituents*" and so "*strictly responsible agents.*" [Op. Cit., p. 288] Anarchists had held this position a number of years **before** the Commune introduced it. Proudhon was arguing in 1848 for "*universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.*" In 1868, Bakunin likewise wrote that the "*Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63 and p. 155] In addition, the similarities with the Commune's political ideas and Proudhon's are clear, as are the similarities between the Russian Soviets and Bakunin's views on revolution.

So, as well as predicting the degeneration of social democracy and the Russian revolution, anarchists have also predicted such key aspects of revolutionary situations as organising on the basis of workplace and having delegates mandated and subject to instant recall. Such predictions flow from taking part in social movements and analysing their tendencies. Moreover, a revolution is the resisting of current authorities and an act of self-liberation and so its parallels with anarchism are clear. As such the class struggle, revolutionary movements and revolutions have a libertarian basis and tendencies and, therefore, it is unsurprising that anarchist ideas have spontaneously developed in them. Thus we have an interaction between ideas and action. Anarchist ideas have been produced spontaneously by the class struggle due

to its inherent nature as a force confronting authority and its need for self-activity and self-organisation. Anarchism has learned from that struggle and influenced it by its generalisations of previous experiences and its basis in opposing hierarchy. Anarchist predictions, therefore, come as no surprise.

Marxists have not only been behind the class struggle itself, they have also been behind anarchism in terms of practical ideas on a social revolution and how to organise to transform society. While anarchist ideas have been confirmed by the class struggle, Marxist ones have had to be revised to bring them closer to the actual state of the struggle and to the theoretical ideas of anarchism. And the SWP have the cheek to present these ideas as if their tradition had thought of them.

Little wonder the SWP fail to present an honest account of anarchism.

8. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Russian Revolution?

The history lesson by the SWP continues:

"This happened in Russia in October 1917 in a revolution led by the Bolshevik Party."

In reality, this did not happen. In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party took power in the name of the workers' councils, the councils themselves did not take power. This is confirmed by Trotsky, who notes that the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917 *"was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? . . . Lenin's position was this: . . . the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets."* Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers' delegates. Moreover, he states that *"to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us."* He continued by noting that it was *"one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets."* The Soviet Congress just provided *"the legal cover"* for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [**The Lessons of October**, p. 134, p. 158 and p. 161]

In 1920, he argued that *"[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the . . . party . . . [that] the Soviets . . . [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class."* [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109]

In 1937 he continued this theme by arguing that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard."* Thus, rather than the working class as a whole *"seizing power"*, it is the *"vanguard"* which takes power -- *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* ["*Stalinism and Bolshevism*", **Writings 1936-37**, p. 490 and p. 488] He mocked the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."
[**Op. Cit.**, p. 495]

As can be seen, over a 17 year period Trotsky argued that it was the party which ruled, not the councils. The workers' councils became little more than rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik government (and not even that, as the central government only submitted a fraction of its decrees to the Central Executive of the national soviet, and that soviet was not even in permanent session). As Russian Anarchist Voline made clear *"for, the anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets."* [**The Unknown Revolution**, p. 213] In the words of Kropotkin:

"The idea of soviets . . . councils of workers and peasants . . . controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it is necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the real production of national wealth by their own efforts."

"But as long as the country is governed by a party dictatorship, the workers' and peasants' councils evidently lose their entire significance. They are reduced to the passive rule formerly played by the 'States General,' when they were convoked by the king and had to combat an all-powerful royal council." [**Anarchism**, pp. 254-5]

In other words, the workers' councils took power in name only. Real power rested with the central government and the workers' councils become little more than a means to elect the government. Rather than manage society directly, the soviets simply became a transmission belt for the decrees and orders of the Bolshevik party. Hardly a system to inspire anyone.

However, the history of the Russian Revolution has two important lessons for members of the various anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist groups. First, as we noted in [section 1](#), the so-called vanguard party is usually far behind the class struggle and the ideas developed in it. As another example, we can point to the movement for workers' control and self-management that developed around the factory committees during the summer of 1917 in Russia. It was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers' self-management and control during the Russian Revolution. As historian S.A. Smith correctly summarises, the *"factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up."* [**Red Petrograd**, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism is wage labour, the Russian workers' raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, which failed to raise above a *"trade union conscious"* in this and so many other cases.

Rather than being at the forefront of struggle and ideas, the Bolsheviks were, in fact, busy trying to catch up. History has repeated itself in the anti-capitalist demonstrations of the 2000s. We should point out that anarchists have supported the idea of workers' self-management of production since 1840 and, unsurprisingly enough, were extremely active in the factory committee movement in 1917.

The second lesson to be gained from the Russian Revolution is that while the Bolsheviks happily (and opportunistically) took over popular slogans and introduced them into their rhetoric, they rarely meant the same thing to the Bolsheviks as they did to the masses. For example, the Bolsheviks took up the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" but rather than mean that the Soviets would manage society directly they actually meant the Soviets would delegate their power to a Bolshevik government which would govern society in their name. Similarly with the term "*workers' control of production*." As S.A. Smith correctly notes, Lenin used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees*." In fact Lenin's "*proposals . . . [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous*." [Op. Cit., p. 154] Once in power, the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular meaning of workers' control and replaced it with their own, statist conception. This ultimately resulted in the introduction of "*one-man management*" (with the manager appointed from above by the state). This process is documented in Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, which also indicates the clear links between Bolshevik practice and Bolshevik ideology as well as how both differed from popular activity and ideas.

Hence the comments by Russian Anarchist Peter Arshinov:

*"Another no less important peculiarity is that [the] October [revolution of 1917] has two meanings -- that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party [the Marxist-Communists] that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses." ["The Two Octobers", pp. 13-6, **Libertarian Communist Review**, No. 1 (Winter 1974), p. 14]*

The members of the "anti-capitalist" movements should bear that in mind when the SWP uses the same rhetoric as they do. The history of the Russian Revolution indicates that while Leninists like the SWP can use the same words as popular movements, their interpretation of them can differ drastically.

Take, for example, the expression "anti-capitalist." The SWP will claim that they, too, are "anti-capitalist" but, in fact, they are only opposed to "free market" capitalism and actually support state capitalism. Lenin, for example, argued that workers' must "**unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour**" in April 1918 along with granting "*individual executives dictatorial power (or 'unlimited' powers)*" and that "*the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers*" was, in fact, "*in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government*" simply because "*the history of revolutionary*

movements" had "shown" that "the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes." He notes that "[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy." ["The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government", **Collected Works**, vol. 27, p. 269, p. 267 and pp. 267-8]

He confused state capitalism with socialism: "state-monopoly capitalism is a complete **material** preparation for socialism, the **threshold** of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism **there are no intermediate rungs**." He argued that "socialism is merely the next step forward from statecapitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly **which is made to serve the interests of the whole people** and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly." ["The Impending Catastrophe and how to combat it", **Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p. 363 and p. 362]

As Peter Arshinov argued, a "fundamental fact" of the Bolshevik revolution was "that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of 'working classes' - producers managed by authority from above." He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have "remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists" but they "delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital . . . Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State . . . It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism." [The **History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 35 and p. 71] Therefore, looking at Bolshevism in power and in theory it is clear that it is not, in fact, "anti-capitalist" but rather in favour of state capitalism and any appropriation of popular slogans was always under the firm understanding that the Bolshevik interpretation of these ideas is what will be introduced.

Therefore the SWP's attempt to re-write Russian history. The actual events of the Russian Revolution indicate well the authoritarian and state-capitalist nature of Leninist politics.

9. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Spanish Revolution?

The SWP, after re-writing Russian history, move onto Spanish history:

"It did not happen in Spain in 1936. The C.N.T., a trade union heavily influenced by anarchist ideas, led a workers' uprising in the city of Barcelona that year. Workers' councils effectively ran the city.

"But the capitalist state machine did not simply disappear. The government and its army, which was fighting against Franco's fascist forces, remained, although it had no authority in Barcelona.

"The government even offered to hand power over to the leaders of the C.N.T. But the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong. It turned down the possibility of forming a workers' state, which could have broken the fascists' coup and the capitalist state.

"Worse, it accepted positions in a government that was dominated by pro-capitalist forces.

"That government crushed workers' power in Barcelona, and in doing so fatally undermined the fight against fascism."

It is hard to know where to start with this distortion of history.

Firstly, we have to point out that the C.N.T. did lead a workers' uprising in 1936 but in response to a military coup which had occurred all across Spain. The army was not *"fighting against Franco's fascist forces"* but rather had been the means by which Franco had tried to impose his version of fascism. Indeed, as the SWP know fine well, one of the first acts the C.N.T. did in the Spanish Revolution was to organise workers' militias to go fight the army in those parts of Spain in which the unions (particularly the C.N.T. which lead the fighting) did not defeat it by street fighting. Thus the C.N.T. faced the might of the Spanish army rising in a fascist coup. That, as we shall see, influenced its decisions.

By not mentioning (indeed, lying about) the actual conditions the C.N.T. faced in July 1936, the SWP ensure the reader cannot understand what happened and why the C.N.T. made the decisions it did. Instead the reader is encouraged to think it was purely a result of anarchist theory. Needless to say, members of the SWP would have a fit when it is suggested the actions of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War were simply the result of Leninist ideology and unaffected by the circumstances they were made in (anarchists, as we discuss in [section H.6](#), consider them a product of the interaction of both factors). The logic is simple: the mistakes of Marxists are **never** their fault, **never** derive from Marxist politics and are always attributable to circumstances (regardless of the facts); the mistakes of anarchists, however, **always** derive from their politics and can never be explained by circumstances (regardless of counter-examples and those circumstances). Once this is understood, the reason why the SWP distorted the history of the Spanish Revolution becomes clear.

Secondly, anarchism does not think that the *"capitalist state machine"* will *"simply disappear."* Rather, anarchists think that (to quote Kropotkin) the revolution *"must smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of workers' associations and communes] and it will act accordingly."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 259] In other words, the state does not disappear, it is destroyed and replaced with a new, libertarian, form of social structure. Thus the SWP misrepresents anarchist theory.

Thirdly, yes, the Catalan government did offer to stand aside for the C.N.T. and the C.N.T. rejected the offer. Why? The SWP claim that *"the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong"* and that is why it did not take power. That is true, but what the SWP fail to mention is more important. The C.N.T. refused to implement libertarian communism after the defeat of the army uprising in July 1936 simply because it did not want to be isolated nor have to fight the republican government as well as the fascists (needless to say, such a decision, while understandable, was wrong). But such historical information would confuse the reader with facts and make their case against anarchism less clear-cut.

Ironically the SWP's attack on the C.N.T. indicates well the authoritarian basis of its politics and its support of soviets simply as a means for the party leaders to take power. After all, they obviously consider it a mistake for the *"leaders of the C.N.T."* to refuse power. Trotsky made the same point:

*"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society." ["Stalinism and Bolshevism", **Writings 1936-7**, p. 424]*

Yet the SWP say they, and their political tradition, are for "*workers' power*" yet, in practice, they clearly mean that power will be seized, held and exercised by the workers' leaders. A strange definition of "workers' power," we must admit but one that indicates well the differences between anarchists and Marxists. The former aim for a society based on workers' self-management. The latter desire a society in which workers' delegate their power to control society (i.e. their own lives) to the "leaders," to the "workers' party" who will govern on their behalf. The "leaders" of the C.N.T. quite rightly rejected such this position -- unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time and decided to ignore their politics in favour of collaborating with other anti-fascist unions and parties against Franco.

Simply put, either the workers' have the power or the leaders do. To confuse the rule of the party with workers' self-management of society lays the basis for party dictatorship (as happened in Russia). Sadly, the SWP do exactly this and fail to learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution.

Thus, the SWP's argument against anarchism is logically flawed. Yes, the C.N.T. did not take state power. However, neither did it destroy the state, as anarchist theory argues. Rather it ignored the state and this was its undoing. It attacks anarchism for anarchists failing to act in an anarchist manner. How strange.

One last point. The events of the Spanish Revolution are important in another way for evaluating anarchism and Marxism. Faced with the military coup, the Spanish government did nothing, even refusing to distribute arms to the workers. The workers, however, took the initiative, seized arms by direct action and took to the streets to confront the army. Indeed, the dynamic response of the C.N.T. members to Franco's coup compared to the inaction of the Marxist inspired German workers movement faced with Hitler's taking of power presents us with another example of the benefits of federalism against centralism, of anarchism against Marxism. The federal structure of the C.N.T. had accustomed its members to act for themselves, to show initiative and act without waiting for orders from the centre. The centralised German system did the opposite.

The SWP will argue, of course, that the workers were misled by their leaders ("who were only Marxists in name only"). The question then becomes: why did they not act for themselves? Perhaps because the centralised German workers' movement had eroded their members initiative, self-reliance and spirit of revolt to such a degree that they could no longer act without their leaders instructions? It may be argued that with **better** leaders the German workers would have stopped the Nazis, but such a plea fails to understand **why** better leaders did not exist in the first place. A centralised movement inevitably produces bureaucracy and a tendency for leaders to become conservative and compromised.

All in all, rather than refute anarchism the experience of the Spanish Revolution **confirms** it. The state needs to be destroyed, **not** ignored or collaborated with, and replaced by a federation of workers' councils organised from the bottom-up. By failing to do this, the C.N.T. did ensure the defeat of the revolution but it hardly indicates a failure of anarchism.

Rather it indicates a failure of anarchists who made the wrong decision in extremely difficult circumstances.

Obviously it is impossible to discuss the question of the C.N.T. during the Spanish Revolution in depth here. We do so in [section I.8](#) (including the question of why the C.N.T. collaborated with the Republican state) while we address the issue of Marxist interpretations of Spanish Anarchist history in the appendix "[Marxism and Spanish Anarchism.](#)", with [Section 20](#) of that appendix discussing the C.N.T.'s decision to collaborate with the Republican State against Franco as well as its implications for anarchism.

10. Do anarchists ignore the fact that ideas change through struggle?

The SWP try and generalise from these experiences:

"In different ways, the lessons of Russia and Spain are the same. The organisational questions thrown up in particular struggles are critical when it comes to the working class challenging capitalism.

"Workers face conflicting pressures. On the one hand, they are forced to compete in the labour market. They feel powerless, as an individual, against the boss.

"That is why workers can accept the bosses' view of the world. At the same time constant attacks on workers' conditions create a need for workers to unite and fight back together.

"These two pressures mean workers' ideas are uneven. Some see through the bosses' lies. Others can be largely taken in. Most part accept and part reject capitalist ideas. The overall consciousness of the working class is always shifting. People become involved in struggles which lead them to break with pro-capitalist ideas."

That is very true and anarchists are well aware of it. That is why anarchists organise groups, produce propaganda, argue their ideas with others and encourage direct action and solidarity. We do so because we are aware that the ideas within society are mixed and that struggle leads people to break with pro-capitalist ideas. To quote Bakunin:

*"the germs of [socialist thought] . . . [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal . . . is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct . . . What impedes the swifter development of this salutary though among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? . . . they are insufficient . . . [and] who will conduct this propaganda? . . . [The] workers' world . . . is left with but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** . . . It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trade-unions, organisation** . . . To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the*

collective struggle of the workers against the bosses . . . As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, . . . Socialism replaces religion in his mind. . . through practice and collective experience . . . the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies . . . The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily . . . recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one." [The Basic Bakunin, p. 102-3]

Therefore anarchists are well aware of the importance of struggle and propaganda in winning people to anarchist ideas. No anarchist has ever argued otherwise. Indeed, as we discuss in [Section J](#), this is a key part of anarchist theory and practice.

11. Why do anarchists oppose the Leninist "revolutionary party"?

The SWP argue that:

"So there is always a battle of ideas within the working class. That is why political organisation is crucial. Socialists seek to build a revolutionary party not only to try to spread the lessons from one struggle to another.

"They also want to organise those people who most clearly reject capitalism into a force that can fight for their ideas inside the working class as a whole. Such a party is democratic because its members constantly debate what is happening in today's struggles and the lessons that can be applied from past ones."

That, in itself, is something most anarchists would agree with. That is why they build specific anarchist organisations which discuss and debate politics, current struggles, past struggles and revolutions and so on. In Britain in the early 2000s there were three national anarchist federations (the Anarchist Federation, the Solidarity Federation and the Class War Federation) as well as numerous local groups and regional federations (see [Section J.3](#) for a discussion of anarchist organisations and the role they play in both anarchist theory and practice). The aim of these organisations is to try and influence the class struggle towards anarchist ideas (and, equally important, **learn** from that struggle as well -- the "*program of the Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group], expanded to keep pace with developing situations.*" [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 406]). The need for a specific political organisation is one most anarchists would agree with.

Thus few anarchists are believers in spontaneous revolution and most see the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** to spread anarchist ideas and push the struggle towards anarchist ends (smashing the state and capitalism and the creation of a free federation of workers' councils and communes) via anarchist tactics (direct action, solidarity, general strikes, insurrection and encouraging working class self-organisation and self-management). Hence the need for specific anarchist organisations:

"The Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the revolutionary workers' movement]. But the International and the Alliance, while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses . . . regardless of nationality

and national boundaries or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body; the Alliance . . . tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction. The programs of one and the other, without being opposed, differ in the degree of their revolutionary development. The International contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International." [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 157]

However, anarchists also argue that the revolutionary organisation must also reflect the type of society we want. Hence an anarchist federation must be self-organised from below, rejecting hierarchy and embracing self-management. For anarchists an organisation is not democratic because it debates, as the SWP claims. It is democratic only if the membership actually decides the policy of the organisation. That the SWP fail to mention this is significant and places doubt on whether their organisation is democratic in fact (as we indicate in [section 22](#), the SWP may debate but it is not democratic). The reason why democracy in the SWP may not be all that it should be can be found in their comment that:

"It is also centralised, as it arrives at decisions which everyone acts on."

However, this is not centralisation. Centralisation is when the centre decides everything and the membership follow those orders. That the membership may be in a position to elect those at the centre does not change the fact that the membership is simply expected to follow orders. It is the organisational principle of the army or police, not of a free society. That this is the principle of Leninism can be seen from Trotsky's comment that the "*statues [of the party] should express the leadership's organised distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xi] Thus the centre controls the membership, not vice versa.

In What is to be Done? Lenin discussed "*the confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of democracy.*" He dismisses the idea of self-management as "*Primitive Democracy.*" He uses the example of the early British unions, where workers "*thought that it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all the members, but all the official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn.*" He considered "*such a conception of democracy*" as "*absurd*" and saw it as historical necessity that it was replaced by "*representative institutions*" and "*full-time officials*". [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 162-3] In other words, the Leninist tradition rejects self-management in favour of hierarchical structures in which power is centralised in the hands of "*full-time officials*" and "*representative institutions.*"

In contrast, Bakunin argued that groups which "*simply left all decision-making to their committees*" saw "*power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership.*" The membership become subject to "*the arbitrary power*" of the committees and "*ruled by oligarchs.*" In other words, bureaucracy set in and democracy **as such** was eliminated and while "*very good for the committees*" it was "*not at all favourable for the social, intellectual, and moral progress of the collective power*" of the workers' movement. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 246-7] Who was correct can quickly be seen from the radical and pro-active nature of the British trade union leadership. Ironically, the SWP always bemoan trade union bureaucracies betraying workers in struggle yet promote an

organisational structure that ensures that power flows to the centre and into the hands of bureaucrats.

At best, Leninism reduces "democracy" to mean that the majority designates its rulers, copied from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. In practice it is drained of any real meaning and quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government. That the central committee is designated by a "democratically elected" congress makes no difference once it is elected, it is de facto and de jure the absolute ruler of the organisation. It has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organisations, kick out militants, etc.).

Therefore it is ironic that the SWP promote themselves as supporters of democracy as it is anarchists who support the "*primitive democracy*" (self-management) contemptuously dismissed by Lenin. With their calls for centralisation, it is clear that SWP still follow Lenin, wishing to place decision-making at the centre of the organisation, in the hands of leaders, in the same way the police, army and bureaucratic trade unions do. Anarchists reject this vision as non-socialist and instead argue for the fullest participation in decision making by those subject to those decisions. Only in this way can government -- inequality in power -- be eliminated from society. For further discussion of anarchist opposition to Leninist vanguard parties, see [section H.5](#).

Just to stress the point, anarchists are not opposed to people making decisions and everyone who took part in making the decision acting on them. Such a system is not "centralised," however, when the decisions flow from the bottom-up and are made by mandated delegates, accountable to the people who mandated them. It is centralised when it is decided upon by the leadership and imposed upon the membership. Thus the issue is not whether we organise or not organise, nor whether we co-ordinate joint activity or not, it is a question of how we organise and co-ordinate -- from the bottom up or from the top down. As Bakunin argued:

"Discipline, mutual trust as well as unity are all excellent qualities when properly understood and practised, but disastrous when abused . . . [one use of the word] discipline almost always signifies despotism on the one hand and blind automatic submission to authority on the other. . .

"Hostile as I am to [this,] the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognise that a certain kind of discipline, not automatic but voluntary and intelligently understood is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered co-ordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole. . .

"In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all . . . this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the kind of discipline preached

by the State . . . which wants the old, routine-like, automatic blind discipline. Passive discipline is the foundation of every despotism." [Op. Cit., pp. 414-5]

Therefore, anarchists see the need to make agreements, to stick by them and to show discipline but we argue that this must be to the agreements we helped to make and subject to our judgement. We reject "centralisation" as it confuses the necessity of agreement with hierarchical power, of solidarity and agreement from below with unity imposed from above as well as the need for discipline with following orders.

12. Why do the SWP make a polemical fetish of "unity" and "democracy" to the expense of common sense and freedom?

The SWP argue that "unity" is essential:

"Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy - minorities would simply ignore majority decisions."

Anarchists are in favour of free agreement and so argue that minorities should, in general, go along with the majority decisions of the groups and federations they are members of. That is, after all, the point behind federalism -- to co-ordinate activity. Minorities can, after all, leave an association. As Malatesta argued, *"anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need adapt to the wishes of the many."* [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 100] The Spanish C.N.T. argued in its vision of Libertarian Communism that:

"Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the purpose of achieving goals of a general nature . . . communes . . . will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be majority vote after free debate. . . The inhabitants of a Commune are to debate their internal problems . . . among themselves. Whenever problems affecting an entire comarca [district] or province are involved, it must be the Federations [of communes] who deliberate and at every reunion or assembly these may hold all of the Communes are to be represented and their delegates will relay the viewpoints previously approved in their respective Communes . . . On matters of a regional nature, it will be up to the Regional Federation to put agreements into practice and these agreements will represent the sovereign will of all the region's inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the Commune, to the Federation and right on up finally to the Confederation." [quoted by Jose Pierats, **The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 68-9]

Therefore, as a general rule-of-thumb, anarchists have little problem with the minority accepting the decisions of the majority after a process of free debate and discussion. As we argue in [section A.2.11](#), such collective decision making is compatible with anarchist principles -- indeed, is based on them. By governing ourselves directly, we exclude others governing us. However, we do not make a fetish of this, recognising that, in certain

circumstances, the minority must and should ignore majority decisions. For example, if the majority of an organisation decide on a policy which the minority thinks is disastrous then why should they follow the majority? In 1914, the representatives of the German Social Democratic Party voted for war credits. The anti-war minority of that group went along with the majority in the name of "democracy," "unity" and "discipline". Would the SWP argue that they were right to do so? Similarly, if a majority of a community decided, say, that homosexuals were to be arrested, would the SWP argue that minorities must not ignore that decision? We hope not.

In general, anarchists would argue that a minority should ignore the majority when their decisions violate the fundamental ideas which the organisation or association are built on. In other words, if the majority violates the ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity then the minority can and should reject the decisions of the majority. So, a decision of the majority that violates the liberty of a non-oppressive minority -- say, restricting their freedom of association -- then minorities can and should ignore the decisions and practice civil disobedience to change that decision. Similarly, if a decision violates the solidarity and the feelings of equality which should inform decisions, then, again, the minority should reject the decision. We cannot accept majority decisions without question simply because the majority can be wrong. Unless the minority can judge the decisions of the majority and can reject them then they are slaves of the majority and the equality essential for a socialist society is eliminated in favour of mere obedience.

However, if the actions of the majority are simply considered to be disastrous but breaking the agreement would weaken the actions of the majority, then solidarity should be the overwhelming consideration. As Malatesta argued, "*[t]here are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy . . . What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight oppression and to achieve a society in which everyone will be able to enjoy his [or her] own life.*" [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, pp. 132-3] He stressed the point:

"But such an adaptation [of the minority to the decisions of the majority] on the one hand by one group must be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. . .

"So . . . anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern in human society in general . . . how is it possible . . . to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?" [The Anarchist Revolution, pp. 100-1]

Therefore, while accepting majority decision making as a key aspect of a revolutionary movement and a free society, anarchists do not make a fetish of it. We recognise that we must use our own judgement in evaluating each decision reached simply because the majority is not always right. We must balance the need for solidarity in the common struggle and needs of common life with critical analysis and judgement.

Needless to say, our arguments apply with even more force to the decisions of the **representatives** of the majority, who are in practice a very small minority. Leninists usually try and confuse these two distinct forms of decision making. When groups like the SWP discuss majority decision making they almost always mean the decisions of those elected by the majority -- the central committee or the government -- rather than the majority of the masses or an organisation.

In practice the SWP argue that the majority of an organisation cannot be consulted on every issue and so what they actually mean is that the decisions of the central committee (or government) should be followed at all times. In other words, the decisions of a minority (the leaders) should be obeyed by the majority. A minority owns and controls the "revolutionary" organisation and "democracy" is quickly turned into its opposite. Very "democratic."

As we shall indicate in the next two sections, the SWP do not, in fact, actually follow their own arguments. They are quite happy for minorities to ignore majority decisions -- as long as the minority in question is the leadership of their own party. As we argue in [section 14](#), such activities flow naturally from the vanguardist politics of Leninism and should not come as a surprise.

13. How does the Battle of Prague expose the SWP as hypocrites?

To evaluate the sincerity of the SWP's proclaimed commitment to "*democracy*" and "*centralism*" we just have to look at the actions of their contingent at the demonstration against the WTO and IMF in Prague on September 26th, 2000.

Let us recall that on September 16th, the SWP had argued as follows:

"It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place."

They stressed that importance of "*centralisation*" which they defined as "*arriv[ing] at decisions which everyone acts on. Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy -- minorities would simply ignore majority decisions.*"

In practice, the International Socialist (IS) section of the Prague demonstration (the SWP and its sister parties) ignored their own arguments. Instead of ending up in the Pink sector (for which they had put themselves down) they somehow ended up behind "*Ya Basta*" in the yellow sector. As they were at the front of the march this should have been impossible. It turns out they deliberately entered the wrong sector because they refused to accept the agreed plan to split the march in three.

The protests had been co-ordinated by INPEG. INPEG was established as a democratic implement of communication and co-ordination among individuals and groups which wanted to protest against the annual summit of IMF in Prague during September 2000. It included a variety groups -- for instance reformists (e.g. NESEHNUTI), anarchists (e.g. CSAF or Solidarity) and Leninists (i.e. Socialist Solidarity, sister organisation of the British SWP). The IS group had argued at INPEG committee meetings earlier in the year for a single march on the centre (which of course could not have shut the conference down). They failed to win this

argument and so had betrayed the rest of the protesters on the day by simply marching directly onto the bridge themselves (in the yellow sector) instead of continuing into the Pink sector as they were supposed to.

Why did the SWP do what they did? Presumably they put themselves down for the Pink section because it was at the front of the march and so offered the best media coverage for their placards and banners. Similarly, they joined the Yellow Section because it was marching directly to the conference centre and not, like Pink, going round to the rear and so, again, offered the best media coverage. In other words, they "*did their own thing*", ignored the agreements they made and weakened the protests simply to look the dominant group in the press. Ironically, the Czech media made sure that the Leninist parties got onto their front pages simply because many of them chose to march in Prague with red flags emblazoned with hammer and sickles. Flags associated with the Soviet occupation and the old regime are hardly "popular" and so useful to smear the protests.

The decision of the SWP to ignore the agreed plan was applauded by other Leninists. According to the post-Prague issue of the Communist Party of Great Britain's paper **Weekly Worker**:

"Farcically, the organisers had decided to split the march into three, each with its own route and composition -- blue (anarchist), pink (trade unions and left organisations) and yellow (NGOs and Jubilee 2000). Ostensibly, this started as a tactic designed to facilitate forming a human chain around the conference centre, although by the day of the action this aim had, apparently, been abandoned. Whether these truly stupid arrangements had been accepted beforehand by all on the INPEG (Initiative Against Economic Globalisation) remains hazy, given the paucity of information about the debates and differences on this self-appointed body." ["Prague S26: Time for control", **Weekly Worker** No. 353]

The splitting of the march into three, as a matter of fact, was a great success. It allowed the demonstrators to encircle the conference centre. The marches splitting off from the back working beautifully, catching the police and media by surprise who were clustered at the front of the march (indeed, the police later admitted that they had been caught off guard by the splitting of the march). From the splitting points to the centre the marches were unaccompanied by both police and media. A clear victory. Indeed, what would have been "*truly stupid*" was doing what the police had expected (and SWP wanted) -- to have one big march.

How was the demonstration's organised? According to eye-witness Katharine Viner:

"In the run-up to Tuesday's demonstration I attended the convergence centre, where 'spokes council' meetings took place, and found the sense of community and organisation there astonishing and moving. Every 'affinity group' - NGO or group of friends - sent a spokesperson to meetings to make decisions and work out strategy. It sounds impossible to contain, and it was laborious, but it worked and consensus was found. It felt like proper democracy in a way that the ballot box does not." ["Luddites' we should not ignore", **The Guardian**, 29 September 2000]

Julie Light, of **Corporate Watch**, indicates the same process at work in her account entitled **Spirits, Tensions Run High in Prague** (dated 25 September 2000):

"the activist coalition called the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation (INPEG) is training hundreds of people in civil disobedience at the Convergence Centre. The Centre, a converted warehouse space located under Prague's Libensky Bridge, serves as an information and strategy clearinghouse for the protesters. A 'spokes council' made up of representatives of dozens of groups makes decisions by consensus for this international ad-hoc coalition that has never worked together before. They have an elaborate system of hand signals to indicate their views as they discuss the details of the protests. Given the logistical obstacles, things seem to be running remarkably smoothly."

Obviously "proper democracy" and a council of group spokespeople discussing the protests were not good enough for the SWP and other Leninist groups. Nor, of course, making an agreement and sticking to it.

The **Weekly Worker** complements the SWP's decision:

"Come the march itself, the damage was partially repaired by the decision of a majority of the 'pink' contingent (with the SWP and its international sections to the fore) to simply veer off the agreed route. This pink section then partially merged with the yellow to advance on the conference." [Op. Cit.]

We must point out that the International Socialists appear to have lied about the numbers they were bringing to Prague. The day before the demonstration they claimed they said they would contribute 2,500 to the Pink section -- since then their own press has reported 1,000 in their delegation (the "*day began when over 1,000 marched from the Florenc bus station . . . led by supporters of Socialist Worker and its sister papers elsewhere in Europe*" [**Socialist Worker**, No. 1716]). This would have left the Pink block seriously under strength even if they had not unilaterally left their block.

Their defection from the agreed plan had very serious repercussions on the day -- one gate in the Pink sector was never covered. In the Blue sector, where the anarchists were concentrated, this meant that at the height of a battle with hundreds of riot police, a water cannon and two Armoured Personnel Carriers they were forced to send 300 people on a 2 km hike to attempt to close this gate. Shortly after they left a police charge broke the Blue Block lines leading to arrests and injuries.

Thus, by ignoring the plan and doing their own thing, they not only made a mockery of their own arguments and the decision making process of the demonstration, they also weakened the protest and placed others in danger.

And the net effect of their defection? As the **Weekly Worker** pathetically comments: "*Of course, it was blocked by ranks of riot police . . .*"

As the bridge was a very narrow front this resulted in a huge amount of people stuck behind "*Ya Basta!*" with nothing to do except sit around. So the "International Socialists" and other Leninists who undertook the act of sabotage with them were stuck doing nothing behind "*Ya Basta*" at the bottom of the bridge (as would be expected -- indeed, this exposes another failing of centralism, its inability to know local circumstances, adapt to them and plan taking them into account). The tiny number of anarchists who marched around to cover their gate on the other hand, took the police by surprise and broke through to the conference centre until

driven back by hundreds of riot police. Worse, there were some problems in the "Yellow Block" as the Leninists were pushing from behind and it took some serious explaining to get them to understand that they should stop it because otherwise people in the front line could be crushed to death. Moreover, they demanded to be allowed up alongside "*Ya Basta*" at the front, next to the riot cops, but when "*Ya Basta*" did pull out and invited the SWP to take their place in the front they refused to do so.

Moreover, the actual result of the SWP's disgraceful actions in Prague also indicates the weakness of centralism. Having centrally decided to have one big march (regardless of what the others thought or the majority wished or agreed to) the decision was made with clearly no idea of the local geography otherwise they would have known that the front at the bridge would have been narrow. The net result of the "efficient" centralisation of the SWP? A mass of protestors stuck doing nothing due to a lack of understanding of local geography and the plan to blockade the conference seriously weakened. A federal organisation, on the other hand, would have had information from the local activists who would have been organising the protests and made their plans accordingly.

Therefore, to summarise. Ten days after denouncing anarchism for refusing to accept majority decisions and for being against "centralisation" (i.e. making and keeping agreements), the SWP ignored majority decisions, break agreements and do their own thing. Not only that, they weakened the demonstration and placed their fellow protestors in difficulties simply so they could do nothing someplace else as, unsurprisingly enough, their way was blocked by riot cops. An amazing example of "democratic centralism" in practice and sure to inspire us all to follow the path of Marxism-Leninism!

The hypocrisy of their actions and arguments are clear. The question now arises, what do anarchists think of their action. As we argued in the [last section](#), while anarchists favour direct democracy (self-management) when making decisions we also accept that minorities can and should ignore a majority decision if that decision is considered to be truly disastrous. However, any such decision must be made based on evaluating the damage caused by so making it and whether it would be a violation of solidarity to do so. This is what the SWP clearly failed to do. Their decision not only made a mockery of their own argument, it failed to take into account **solidarity** with the rest of the demonstration.

From an anarchist perspective, therefore, the SWP's decision and actions cannot be justified. They violated the basic principles of a revolutionary movement, the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. They ignored the liberty of others by violating their agreements with them, they violated their equality by acting as if the other groups ideas and decisions did not matter and they violated solidarity by ignoring the needs of the common struggle and so placing their fellow demonstrators in danger. While anarchists **do** respect the rights of minorities to act as they see fit, we also recognise the importance of solidarity with our fellow workers and protestors. The SWP by failing to consider the needs of the common struggle sabotaged the demonstration and should be condemned not only as hypocrites but also as elitists -- the party is not subject to the same rules as other demonstrators, whose wishes are irrelevant when they conflict with the party. The implications for the SWP's proclaimed support for democracy is clear.

So it appears that minorities **can** and **should** ignore agreements -- as long as the minority in question are the leaders of the SWP and its sister parties. They have exposed themselves as being hypocrites. Like their heroes, Lenin and Trotsky, they will ignore democratic decisions

when it suits them (see [next section](#)). This is sickening for numerous reasons -- it placed the rest of the demonstrators in danger, it weakened the demonstration itself and it shows that the SWP say one thing and do the exact opposite. They, and the political tradition they are part of, clearly are not to be trusted. The bulk of the membership went along with this betrayal like sheep. Hardly a good example of revolutionary consciousness. In fact it shows that the "revolutionary" discipline of the SWP is like that of the police or army) and that SWP's centralised system is based on typically bourgeois notions. In other words, the organisational structure desired by the SWP does not encourage the autonomy, initiative or critical thinking of its members (as anarchists have long argued).

Prague shows that their arguments for "centralisation" as necessary for "democracy" are hypocrisy and amount to little more than a call for domination by the SWP's leadership over the anti-capitalist movement -- a call hidden behind the rhetoric of "democracy." As can be seen, in practice the SWP happily ignores democracy when it suits them. The party always comes first, regardless of what the people it claims to represent actually want. In this they follow the actions of the Bolsheviks in power. Little wonder Marxism-Leninism is dying -- the difference between what they claim and what they do is becoming increasingly well known.

14. Is the Leninist tradition actually as democratic as the SWP like to claim?

While the SWP attack anarchism for being undemocratic for being against "centralism" the truth is that the Leninist tradition is fundamentally undemocratic. Those, like the SWP, who are part of the Bolshevik tradition have no problem with minorities ignoring majority decisions -- as long as the minority in question is the leadership of the vanguard party. We discussed the example of the "*battle of Prague*" in the [last section](#), now we turn to Bolshevism in power during the Russian Revolution (also see [section H.6](#)).

For example, the Bolsheviks usually overthrew the results of provincial soviet elections that went against them [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp 22-24]. It was in the spring of 1918 that the Bolsheviks showed how little they really supported the soviets. As discontent grew soviet after soviet fell to Menshevik-SR blocs. To stay in power they had to destroy the soviets and they did: opposition victories were followed by disbanding of the soviets and often martial law. [Vladimir Brovkin, "*The Menshevik's Political Comeback: The elections to the provincial soviets in spring 1918*", **Russian Review** no. 42 (1983), pp. 1-50] In addition, the Bolsheviks abolished by decree soldiers' councils and the election of officers in the Red Army in favour of officers appointed from above (see [section 11](#) of the appendix "[Marxism and Spanish Anarchism](#)" for details). They replaced self-managed factory committees with appointed, autocratic managers (see M. Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** or [section 17](#) of the appendix "[Marxism and Spanish Anarchism](#)" for details). All this before the start of the Russian Civil War. Similarly, Lenin and Trotsky happily replaced the democratically elected leaders of trade unions with their followers when it suited them.

As Trotsky argued in 1921, you cannot place "*the workers' right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!*" He continued by stating the "*Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every*

moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy." [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

Of course, such a position follows naturally from Lenin's theory from **What is to be Done?** that *"the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness . . . The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism], however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals . . . the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia."* This meant that *"Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness . . . could only be brought to them from without."* [**Essential Lenin**, pp. 74-5]

For Leninists, if the workers' act in ways opposed to by the party, then the party has the right to ignore, even repress, the workers -- they simply do not (indeed, cannot) understand what is required of them. They cannot reach *"socialist consciousness"* by their own efforts -- indeed, their opinions can be dismissed as *"there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement **the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology . . . to belittle socialist ideology in any way, to deviate from it in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology . . . the spontaneous development of the labour movement leads to it becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology."*** [Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 82] Given that the socialist ideology cannot be communicated without the vanguard party, this means that the **party** can ignore the wishes of the masses simply because such wishes **must be** influenced by "bourgeois" ideology. Thus Leninism contains within itself the justification for eliminating democracy within the revolution. From Lenin's arguments to Bolshevik actions during the revolution and Trotsky's assertions in 1921 is only a matter of time -- and **power**.

In other words, the SWP's *"Battle of Ideas"* becomes, once the vanguard is in power, just a battle:

"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves." [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution**, as do the SWP in their article.

It is hard to combine these facts and the SWP's comments with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule -- after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises -- who decides what a "wavering" or "unstable" element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice that the party

leadership gets to decide -- and that element is whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets which reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression of its enemies (including elements within, or even the whole of, the working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons.

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we note, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 -- they are to "*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*"). Any independence on their part would be considered "*wavering*" or an expression of "*unstable*" natures and so subject to "*revolutionary coercion*". In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level -- vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government if it dislikes the "*passing moods*" expressed by them -- and the Bolsheviks **did** disband soviets when they considered the wrong elements had been elected to them) and so a highly centralised state system cannot be responsive to real control from below.

Secondly, "*revolutionary coercion*" against "*wavering*" elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed "*unstable*" and become subject to "*revolutionary*" coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Leninist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing the government they hold in that ideology. The Leninist conception of workers' councils is purely instrumental. In 1907, Lenin argued that:

*"our Party . . . has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies . . . to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement . . . the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party representative working-class institutions, such as Soviets . . . for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind that if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous". ["Draft Resolutions for the Fifth Congress of the R.S.D.L.P", **Collected Works**, vol. 12, p. 143]*

As can be seen from the experiences of Russia under Lenin, this perspective did not fundamentally change -- given a conflict between the councils and the party, the party always came first and soviets became superfluous.

15. Why is the SWP's support for centralisation anti-socialist?

The SWP continue:

"Centralism is needed above all because the capitalist state is centralised. The police, media moguls, employers, the state bureaucracy and governments act in a concerted way to protect the system."

Very true -- the state **is** centralised. However, the SWP fail to analyse *why* the state is centralised. Simply put, the state is centralised to **facilitate minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance -- rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state and capitalist company. As Kropotkin summarised as regards the capitalist class:

"we see the growing power of the bourgeoisie which shrewdly worked to establish its authority in the place of the authority of the royalty and nobility which it demolished systematically. To this end the bourgeois struggled bitterly, cruelly if need be, in order to establish a powerful, centralised State, which absorbed everything and secured their property . . . along with their full freedom to exploit the poor and speculate on the national wealth . . . and it created its political form to maintain it -- representative government in the centralised State." [Modern Science and Anarchy, p. 191]

The SWP assume that centralisation is simply a tool without content. Rather, it is a tool that has been fashioned to do a specific job, namely to exclude the bulk of the population from the decision making process ("*this ideal had been designed from the viewpoint of the bourgeois, in direct opposition to the egalitarian and communist tendencies of the people.*" [Kropotkin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 366]) It is designed that way and can have no other result. For that reason anarchists reject centralisation. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued: "*How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible.*" [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Thus Rudolf Rocker:

"For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the

whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies." [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 61]

Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

The implication of the SWP's argument is that centralisation is required for co-ordinated activity. Anarchists disagree. Yes, there is a need for co-ordination and joint activity, but that must be created from below, in new ways that reflect the goals we are aiming for. During the Spanish Revolution anarchists organised militias to fight the fascists. One was led by anarchist militant Durruti. His military adviser, Pérez Farras, a professional soldier, was concerned about the application of libertarian principles to military organisation. Durruti replied:

"I have already said and I repeat; during all my life, I have acted as an anarchist. The fact of having been given political responsibility for a human collective cannot change my convictions. It is under these conditions that I agreed to play the role given to me by the Central Committee of the Militias.

"I thought -- and what has happened confirms my belief -- that a workingmen's militia cannot be led according to the same rules as an army. I think that discipline, co-ordination and the fulfilment of a plan are indispensable. But this idea can no longer be understood in the terms of the world we have just destroyed. We have new ideas. We think that solidarity among men must awaken personal responsibility, which knows how to accept discipline as an autonomous act.

"Necessity imposes a war on us, a struggle that differs from many of those that we have carried on before. But the goal of our struggle is always the triumph of the revolution. This means not only victory over the enemy, but also a radical change in man. For this change to occur, man must learn to live in freedom and develop in himself his potentialities as a responsible individual. The worker in the factory, using his tools and directing production, is bringing about a change in himself. The fighter, like the worker, uses his gun as a tool and his acts must lead to the same goals as those of the worker.

*"In the struggle he cannot act like a soldier under orders but like a man who is conscious of what he is doing. I know it is not easy to get such a result, but what one cannot get by reason, one can never get through force. If our revolutionary army must be maintained through fear, we will have changed nothing but the colour of fear. It is only by freeing itself from fear that a free society can be built." [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 224]*

Durruti's words effectively refute the SWP's flawed argument. We need to organise, co-operate, co-ordinate our activities but we cannot do so in bourgeois ways. We need to discover new ways, based on libertarian ideas and not capitalist ones like centralisation.

Indeed, this conflict between the Leninist support for traditional forms of organisational structure and the new forms produced by workers in struggle occurred during the Russian Revolution. One such area of conflict was the factory committee movement and its attempts at workers' self-management of production. As historian A.S. Smith summarises:

"Implicit in the movement for workers' control was a belief that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, the factory committees had become aware -- in a partial and groping way, to be sure -- that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction -- the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute . . . inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy.

"Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him, capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that such methods undermined workers' initiative at the point of production. This was because Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power . . . There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a conception of localising such power at the point of production." [Red Petrograd, pp. 261-2]

The outcome of this struggle was the victory of the Bolshevik vision (as it had state power to enforce it) and the imposition of apparently "efficient" capitalist methods of organisation. However, the net effect of using (or, more correctly, imposing) capitalist organisations was, unsurprisingly, the re-introduction of capitalist social relations. Little wonder the Russian Revolution quickly became just another form of capitalism -- *state* capitalism where the state appointed manager replaced the boss and the workers' position remained identical. Lenin's attempts to centralise production simply replaced workers' power at the point of production with that of state bureaucrats.

We must point out the central fallacy of the SWP's argument. Essentially they are arguing you need to fight fire with fire. They argue that the capitalist class is centralised and so, in order to defeat them, so must we. Unfortunately for the SWP, you do not put a fire out with fire, you put fire out with water. Therefore, to defeat centralised system you need decentralised social organisation. Such decentralisation is required to include the bulk of the population in the revolutionary struggle and does not imply isolation. A decentralised movement does not preclude co-ordination or co-operation but that co-ordination must come from below, based on federal structures, and not imposed from above.

So a key difference between anarchism and Marxism on how the movement against capitalism should organise in the here and now. Anarchists argue that it should prefigure the society we desire -- namely it should be self-managed, decentralised, built and organised

from the bottom-up in a federal structure. This perspective can be seen from the justly famous Sonvillier Circular:

*"The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International will give itself. We must therefore take care to ensure that this organisation is close as possible to our ideal. How could an egalitarian and free society emerge from an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must from now on be the faithful reflection of our principles of federation and liberty" ["Circular to all the Federations of the International Workers' Association", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, p. 216]*

Of course, Marx and Engels replied to this argument and, in so doing, misrepresented the anarchist position. They argued that anarchists position meant that the *"Paris Communards would not have failed if they had understood that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society' and had cast away all discipline and all arms, that is, the things which must disappear when there are no more wars!"* ["Fictitious Splits in the International", **Collected Works**, vol. 23, p. 115] Needless to say this is simply a slander on the anarchist position. Anarchists, as the Circular makes clear, recognise that we cannot totally reflect the future and so the current movement can only be *"as near as possible to our ideal."* Thus we have to do things, such as fighting the bosses, rising in insurrection, smashing the state or defending a revolution, which we would not have to do in a socialist society but that does not imply we should not try and organise in a socialist way in the here and now. Such common sense, unfortunately, is lacking in Marx and Engels who instead decided to utter nonsense for a cheap polemical point.

Therefore, if we want a revolution which is more than just a change in who the boss is, we must create new forms of organisation and struggle which do not reproduce the traits of the world we are fighting. To put out the fire of class society, we need the water of a classless society and so we should organise in a libertarian way, building the new world in the shell of the old.

16. Why is the SWP wrong about the A16 Washington D.C. demo?

To show why Marxism is better than anarchism they give an example:

"Protesters put up several roadblocks during the major anti-capitalist demonstration in Washington in April of this year. The police tried to clear them. The question arose of what the protesters should do.

"Some wanted to try to maintain the roadblocks. Others thought the best tactic was to reorganise the protests into one demonstration. Instead of coming to a clear decision and acting on it, the key organiser of the whole event told people at each roadblock to do what they thought was right.

"The resulting confusion weakened all the protests."

Firstly, we must point out that this argument is somewhat ironic coming from a party that ignored the agreed plan during the Prague anti-WTO demonstration and did "*what they thought was right*" (see [section 13](#)). Secondly, the various anti-capitalist demonstrations have been extremely effective and have been organised in an **anarchist** manner thus refuting the SWP. Thirdly, unfortunately for the SWP, they have the facts all wrong. The World Bank/IMF complex in Washington DC was extremely difficult to blockade. The police isolated over 50 blocks around the venue on the day of the demonstration. The city has very wide streets. Many World Bank and IMF Delegates spent the night in those buildings, or came in early long before sunrise. This calls into question whether a blockade was the best strategy considering the logistic details involved (the Blockade strategy was abandoned for the Republican and Democratic Party Conference demonstrations). In addition to the blockades, there was an officially permitted rally blocks away from the action.

The tactical process worked in practice like this. While there was an original plan agreed to by consensus at the beginning of the blockades by all affinity groups, with groups picking which intersection to occupy and which tactics to use, there was a great deal of flexibility as well. There were several flying columns that moved from intersection to intersection reinforcing barricades and increasing numbers where it looked like police might charge. The largest of these was the Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc (RACB, i.e., "*the Black Bloc*") made up mostly of class-struggle anarchists but included a number of other left libertarians (such as council communists and autonomists). The RACB officially maintained its autonomy within the demonstration and worked with others when and where it could. The affinity groups of the RACB would come to quick decisions on what to do. Often, they would quickly respond to the situation; usually their appearance was enough for the cops to fall back after a few tense moments.

By early afternoon, the various affinity groups manning the blockades were informed that the blockades had failed, and enough delegates had made it inside that the meeting was continuing with only a short delay. So the question became one of what to do next? There were varying opinions. Some affinity groups favoured maintaining their blockades symbolically as an act of defiance and hoping to slow the dispersion of World Bank/IMF representatives as they left the meeting. Others wished to have a victory march around the area. Others wanted to join the rally. Some wanted to march on the World Bank and try for an occupation. There was no consensus. After much discussion between the affinity groups, a decision was reached.

The RACB was divided between two choices -- either join with the rally or march on the Bank. There was a lot of negotiation back and forth between affinity groups. A compromise was reached. The RACB would move to each blockade in order to provide cover for those locked down to unlock and safely merge with the growing march so that attempts could be made the next day to blockade. The march continued to swell as it made its way along the route, eventually merging with the crowd at the permitted demonstration.

A decision was made. Perhaps it was not the most militant. Perhaps it did not foresee that the next day would lack the numbers to even attempt a successful blockade. But arrests on the demonstration were kept to a minimum, a large show of strength was put on and strong feelings of solidarity and camaraderie grew. The cops could only control a few square blocks, the rest of the city was ours. And it was a decision that everyone had a part in making, and one that everyone could live with. It is called self-management, perhaps it is not always the fastest method of making decisions, but it is the best one if you desire freedom.

Of course, the last thing the SWP would want to admit is that anarchists led the victory march around Washington D.C. without a permit, without marshals, without many arrests and a minimal amount of violence by the agents of the State. Of all the recent demonstrations in the U.S. the black bloc was the largest and most well received at Washington. Moreover, that demonstration showed that decentralised, federal organisation worked in practice. Each affinity group participated in the decision making process and an agreement reached between all involved. Centralisation was not required, no centre imposed the decision. Rather than weaken the protests, decentralisation strengthened it by involving all in the decision making process. Little wonder the SWP re-wrote history.

17. Why does the SWP's Washington example refute the its own argument and not anarchism?

However, let us assume that the SWP's fictional account of the A16 demonstration (see [last section](#)) was, in fact, true. What does it actually mean? We must point out its interesting logic. They state that the protests had a "key organiser" which means they were centralised. They also assert that the protestors looked to that person for direction. Unfortunately that person could not come to a "clear decision" and instead handed back decision making to each roadblock. In other words, centralisation failed, not federalism. Moreover, the state would have had a simple means to destroy the demonstration -- arrest the "key organiser." In a centralised system, without a centre, the whole structure collapses -- without someone giving orders, nothing is done.

In a federal structure each roadblock would have sent a delegate to a council to co-ordinate struggle (which, we stress, was what actually did happen). To quote Bakunin, *"there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade . . . these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 155]

In the SWP's version of history, the blockades did not do this and so, unsurprisingly, without organisation, there was confusion. As an argument against anarchism it is useless. So the SWP's fictional example is an argument against centralisation -- of placing decision-making power at the centre. In their story, faced with the task of co-ordinating actions which they had no knowledge of, the "key organiser" could not act and by not having a federal structure, the roadblocks were weakened due to lack of co-ordination.

In reality, a federal structure existed within the demonstration, each roadblock and affinity group could take effective action instantly to counter the police, without waiting for instructions from the centre, as well as communicate what has happening to other roadblocks and come to common agreements on what action to take. The Washington demonstration -- like the other anti-capitalist demonstrations -- showed the effectiveness of anarchist principles, of decentralisation and federalism from the bottom up.

So the SWP's analysis of the Washington demonstration is faulty on two levels. Firstly, their account is not accurate. The demonstration was organised in a decentralised manner and worked extremely well. Secondly, even if their account was not fiction, it proves the failure of centralisation, not federalism.

They draw a lesson from their fictional account: *"The police, needless to say, did not 'decentralise' their decision making. They co-ordinated across the city to break the protests."*

Such an analogy indicates the bourgeois and authoritarian nature of the SWP's politics. They do not understand that the capitalist state and workplace is centralised for a reason. It is to concentrate power into the hands of a few, with the many reduced to mere order takers. It is the means by which bourgeois rule is enforced, as noted in [section 15](#),

Moreover, they seem to be arguing that if we followed the example of the bourgeois state, of the organisational structure of the police or the army, then we would be as "effective" as they are. They are, in effect, arguing that the anti-capitalist movement should reproduce the regulated docility of the armed forces into its ranks, reproduce the domination of a few bosses at the top over a mass of unquestioning automations at the bottom. As Murray Bookchin argued, the Leninist *"has always had a grudging admiration and respect for that most inhuman of all hierarchical institutions, the military."* [**Toward an Ecological Society**, p. 254f] The SWP prove him right.

18. Why is a "revolutionary party" a contradiction in terms?

The SWP continue by arguing that *"Anarchists say a revolutionary party is at best unnecessary and at worst another form of authoritarianism. But they cannot avoid the problems that a revolutionary party addresses."* In reality, while anarchists reject the "revolutionary" party, they do not reject the need for an anarchist federation to spread anarchist ideas, convince others of our ideas and to give a lead during struggles. We reject the Bolshevik style "revolutionary party" simply because it is organised in a centralised, bourgeois, fashion and so produces all the problems of capitalist society within so-called revolutionary organisations. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class." [**Carry on Recruiting!**, p. 41]

Such an organisation can never create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create. To build organisations which are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of capitalism/statism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential. As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events . . . In the beginning . . . it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines **that reflect the very society it professes to oppose** . . . Its membership is schooled in obedience . . . The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation . . . Its leaders . . . lose contact*

with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently. . .

"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns-as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect-in moulding society in its own hierarchical imagine if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state -- and a party to 'guard' it.

"On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralysed; the obedient membership had no one to obey and tends to flounder . . .

". . . the Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917 -- first in his efforts to reorient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the 'April Theses'), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to 'the lower ranks of the party.'" [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 123-6]

As [section H.5.12](#) shows, the example of the "successful" Russian Revolution indicates the weakness of Leninism -- Lenin had to fight the party machine he helped create in order to get it to do anything revolutionary. Hardly a good example of a "revolutionary" party.

But, then again, the SWP know that anarchists do not reject the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle for they suggest that *"Anarchism's attempts to deal with them have been far less effective and less democratic."* The question is not of one of **whether** revolutionaries should organise together but **how** they do this. As we shall see in the next four sections, the SWP's examples of revolutionary anarchist organisations are either unique and so cannot be generalised from (Bakunin's ideas on revolutionary organisation), or false (the F.A.I. was **not** organised in the way the SWP claim). Indeed, the simple fact is that the SWP **ignore** the usual ways anarchists organise as anarchists -- see [section J.3](#) for details -- and yet try and draw conclusions about anarchism from their faulty examples.

19. Do anarchists operate "in secret"?

The SWP begins their account of how they think anarchists organise with the following assertion:

"All the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised but have operated in secret."

It is just as well they say *"all the major anarchist organisations,"* as it allows them to ignore counter-examples by dismissing any counter-examples provided by anarchists as not being *"major"*. We can point to hundreds of anarchist organisations that were or are not secret.

For example, the Italian Anarchist Union (IAU) was a non-secret organisation which existed in Italy before the rise of fascism (see [section A.5.5](#)). Given that the IAU had around 20,000 members in 1920, we wonder by what criteria the SWP excludes it from being a *"major anarchist organisation"*? After all, estimates of the membership of the F.A.I. (one of the SWP's two *"major"* anarchist organisations) vary from around 6,000 to around 30,000. Bakunin's "Alliance" (the other SWP example) amounted to, at most, under 100. In terms of size, the IAU was equal to the F.A.I. and outnumbered the "Alliance" considerably. Why was the UAI not a *"major anarchist organisation"*?

Another, more up to date, example is the French Anarchist Federation which organises today. It has a weekly paper and groups all across France as well as in Belgium. That is not secret and is one of the largest anarchist organisations existing today (and so, by anyone's standards *"a major anarchist organisation"*). We wonder why the SWP excludes it?

The answer is obvious enough -- because they know their claim is false.

As can be seen, the SWP's claim is simply a lie. Few anarchist organisations have been secret. Those that have been secret have done so when conditions demanded it (for example, during periods of repression and when operating in countries with authoritarian governments). Just as Marxist organisations have done. For example, the Bolsheviks were secret for great periods of time under Tsarism and, ironically enough, the Trotskyist-Zinovievist **United Opposition** had to resort to secret and conspiratorial organisation to reach the Russian Communist Party rank and file in the 1920s. So to suggest that anarchists have some sort of monopoly of secret organising is simply a lie -- Marxists, like anarchists, have sometimes organised in secret when they have been forced to by state repression or likelihood of state repression. It is not a principle but, rather, sometimes a necessity. As anyone with even a basic grasp of anarchist history would know.

As for the SWP's claim that *"all the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised"*, this is also a lie as we shall prove in the sections [20](#) and [22](#). The best that can be said of it is that, like all Marxists, the SWP confuse any form of collective, co-ordinated decision making with "centralism" whether it is done in a federal manner from the bottom-up or imposed from the top-down in a centralist fashion.

20. Why is the SWP wrong about Bakunin's organisation?

As an example of a *"major anarchist organisation"* the SWP point to Bakunin and the organisations he created:

"The 19th century theorist of anarchism Mikhail Bakunin's organisation had a hierarchy of committees, with half a dozen people at the top, which were not under the democratic control of its members."

Firstly, we have to wonder why anyone would have wanted to join Bakunin's group if they had no say in the organisation. Also, given that communication in the 19th century was extremely slow, such an organisation would have spent most of its time waiting for instructions from above. Why would anyone want to join such a group? Simple logic undermines the SWP's argument.

Secondly, we should also point out that the Bolshevik party itself was a secret organisation for most of its life in Tsarist Russia. Bakunin, an exile from that society, would have been aware, like the Bolsheviks, of the necessity of secret organising. Moreover, having spent a number of years imprisoned by the Tsar, Bakunin would not have desired to end up back in prison after escaping from Siberia to the West. In addition, given that the countries in which anarchists were operating at the time were not democracies, in the main, a secret organisation would have been considered essential. As Murray Bookchin argues, "*Bakunin's emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival.*" [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 24] The SWP ignore the historical context.

Thirdly, the reality of Bakunin's organisation is slightly different from the SWP's claims. We have discussed this issue in great detail in [section J.3.7](#), however, here it is useful to indicate the type of organisation Bakunin thought was necessary to aid the revolution. If we do, it soon becomes clear that the SWP's claim that it was "*not under the democratic control of its members*" is not true. To do so we shall quote from his letter to the Russian Nihilist Sergy Nechayev in which he explains the differences in their ideas. He discusses the "*principles and mutual conditions*" for a "*new society*" of revolutionaries in Russia (noting that this was an "*outline of a plan*" which "*must be developed, supplemented, and sometimes altered according to circumstances*"):

"Equality among all members and the unconditional and absolute solidarity -- one for all and all for one -- with the obligation for each and everyone to help each other, support and save each other. . .

*"Complete frankness among members and proscription of any Jesuitical methods in their relationships . . . When a member has to say anything against another member, this must be done at a general meeting and in his presence. **General fraternal control of each other** . . .*

"Everyone's personal intelligence vanished like a river in the sea in the collective intelligence and all members obey unconditionally the decisions of the latter.

"All members are equal; they know all their comrades and discuss and decide with them all the most important and essential questions bearing on the programme of the society and the progress of the cause. The decision of the general meeting is absolute law. . .

"The society chooses an Executive Committee from among their number consisting of three or five members who should organise the branches of the society and manage its activities in all the regions of the [Russian] Empire on the basis of the programme and general plan of action adopted by the decision of the society as a whole. . .

"This Committee is elected for an indefinite term. If the society . . . the People's Fraternity is satisfied with the actions of the Committee, it will be left as such; and while it remains a Committee each member . . . and each regional group have to obey it unconditionally, except in such cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all . . . have participated equally in the discussion of them . . .

"In such a case members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting . . . If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it. . .

"Any member or any group is subject to judgement by the general meeting . . .

"No new Brother can be accepted without the consent of all or at the very least three-quarters of all the members. . .

*"The Committee divides the members . . . among the Regions and constitutes Regional groups of leaderships from them . . . Regional leadership is charged with organising the second tier of the society -- the **Regional Fraternity**, on the basis of the same programme, the same rules, and the same revolutionary plan . . .*

*"All members of the **Regional Fraternity** know each other, but do not know of the existence of the **People's Fraternity**. They only know that there exists a **Central Committee** which hands down to them their orders for execution through **Regional Committee** which has been set up by it, i.e. by the **Central Committee** . . .*

*"Each Regional Committee will set up **District** Committees from members of the **Regional Fraternity** and will appoint and replace them. . . .*

*"District Committees can, if necessary and only with the consent of the Regional Committee, set up a third tier of the organisation -- **District Fraternity** with a programme and regulations as near as possible to the general programme and regulations of the People's Fraternity. The programme and regulations of the District Fraternity will not come into force until they are discussed and passed by the general meeting of the Regional Fraternity and have been confirmed by the Regional Committee . . .*

"Jesuitical control . . . are totally excluded from all three tiers of the secret organisation . . . The strength of the whole society, as well as the morality, loyalty, energy and dedication of each member, is based exclusively and totally on the shared truth, sincerity and trust, and on the open fraternal control of all over each one."
[quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, pp. 264-6]

As can be seen, while there is much in Bakunin's ideas that few anarchists would agree to, it cannot be said that it was **not** under the "democratic control of its members." The system of committees is hardly libertarian but neither is it the top-down dictatorship the SWP claim it was. For example, the central committee was chosen by the "general meeting" of the members, which also decided upon the "programme of the society and the progress of the

cause." Its "decision" was "absolute law" and the central committee could be replaced by it. Moreover, the membership could ignore the decisions of the central committee if it "contradict[ed] either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all . . . have participated equally in the discussion of them." Each tier of the organisation had the same "programme and regulations." Anarchists today would agree that Bakunin's plan was extremely flawed. The appointment of committees from above is hardly libertarian, even given that each tier had the same "regulations" and so general meetings of each Fraternity, for example. However, the SWP's summary of Bakunin's ideas, as can be seen, is deeply flawed.

Given that no other anarchist group or federation operated in this way, it is hard to generalise from Bakunin's flawed ideas on the organisation of revolutionary groups to a conclusion about anarchism. But, of course, this is what the SWP do -- and such a generalisation is simply a lie. The F.A.I., the SWP's other example, indicates how most anarchist organisations work in practice -- namely, a decentralised federation of autonomous groups (see [section 22](#)).

Moreover, as we will indicate in the [next section](#), the SWP have little reason to attack Bakunin's ideas. This is because Lenin had similar (although not identical) ones on the question of organising revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia and because the SWP are renown for their leadership being secretive, centralised, bureaucratic and top-down.

In summary, anarchists agree with the SWP that Bakunin's ideas are not to be recommended while pointing out that the likes of the SWP fail to provide an accurate account of their internal workings (i.e. they were more democratic than the SWP suggest), the role Bakunin saw for them in the labour movement and revolution or the historical context in which they were shaped. Moreover, we also argue that their comments against Bakunin, ironically, apply with equal force to their own party which is renown, like all Bolshevik-style parties, as being undemocratic, top-down and authoritarian.

21. Why is the SWP's attack on Bakunin's organisation ironic?

That the SWP attack Bakunin's organisational schema (see [last section](#)) is somewhat ironic. After all, the Bolshevik party system had many of the features of Bakunin's organisational plan. If Bakunin, quite rightly, should be attacked for certain aspects of these ideas, then so must Bolshevik parties like the SWP.

For example, Lenin argued in favour of centralisation and secrecy in his work **What is to be Done?**, arguing as follows:

*"The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that a 'dozen' experienced revolutionaries, no less professionally trained than the police, will centralise all the secret side of the work -- prepare leaflets, work out approximate plans and **appoint bodies of leaders** for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution, etc. [our emphasis] (I know that exception will be taken to my 'undemocratic' views, but I shall reply to this altogether unintelligent objection later on.) The centralisation of the most secret functions in an organisation of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and the quality of the activity of a large number of other*

organisations that are intended for wide membership and which, therefore, can be as loose and as public as possible, such as trade unions; workers' circles for self-education and the reading illegal literature, and socialist and also democratic, circles for all other sections of the population, etc., etc. We must have as large a number as possible of such organisations having the widest possible variety of functions, but it would be absurd and dangerous to confuse them with the organisation of revolutionaries, to erase the line of demarcation between them, to make still more the masses' already incredibly hazy appreciation of the fact that in order to 'serve' the mass movement we must have people who will devote themselves exclusively to Social-Democratic activities, and that such people must train themselves patiently and steadfastly to be professional revolutionaries." [The Essential Lenin, p. 149]

And:

"The only serious organisational principle the active workers of our movement can accept is strict secrecy, strict selection of members, and the training of professional revolutionaries. If we possessed these qualities, something even more than 'democratism' would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries. And this is absolutely essential for us, because in Russia it is useless thinking that democratic control can substitute for it." [our emphasis, Op. Cit., p. 162]

Thus we have Lenin advocating "strict secrecy, strict selection of members" as well as a centralised party which will "appoint bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution." The parallels with Bakunin's system are clear and are predominately the result of the identical political conditions both revolutionaries experienced. While anarchists are happy to indicate and oppose the non-libertarian aspects of Bakunin's ideas, it is hard for the likes of the SWP to attack Bakunin while embracing Lenin's ideas on the party, justifying their more "un-democratic" aspects as a result of the objective conditions of Tsarism.

Similar top-down perspectives can be seen from Bolshevism in power. The 1918 constitution of the Soviet Union argued that local soviets were to "carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power." In 1919, the Bolshevik's Eighth Party Congress strengthened party discipline. As Maurice Brinton notes, the "Congress ruled that each decision must above all be fulfilled. Only after this is an appeal to the corresponding Party organ permissible." He quotes the resolution: "The whole matter of posting of Party workers is in the hands of the Central Committee. Its decisions are binding for everyone." [The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, pp. 55-6]

This perspective was echoed in the forerunner of the SWP, the **International Socialists**. In September 1968, the Political Committee of International Socialism submitted the "Perspectives for I.S." Point 4 said:

"Branches must accept directives from the Centre, unless they fundamentally disagree with them, in which case they should try to accord with them, while demanding an open debate on the matter." [quoted by Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 55fn]

The parallels with Bakunin's ideas are clear. However, it is to Bakunin's credit that he argued that while "each regional group have to obey it [the central committee] unconditionally" he

recognised that there existed "cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all . . . have participated equally in the discussion of them." when this happened, "members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee's orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting . . . If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it." [quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, pp. 264-6] Thus, rather than the unquestioning obedience of the Bolshevik party, who have to obey, then complain, the members of Bakunin's group did not negate their judgement and could refuse to carry out orders.

Therefore, the SWP have a problem. On the one hand, they denounce Bakunin's ideas of a centralised, secret top-down organisation of revolutionaries. On the other, the party structure that Lenin recommends is a tightly disciplined, centralised, top-down structure with a membership limited to those who are willing to be professional revolutionaries. If they attack Bakunin, they must attack Lenin, not to do so is hypocrisy.

The simple fact is that the parallels between Bakunin's and Lenin's organisational ideas cannot be understood without recognising that both revolutionaries were operating in an autocratic state under conditions of complete illegality, with a highly organised political police trying to infiltrate and destroy any attempt to change the regime. Once this is recognised, the SWP's comments can be seen to be hypocritical in the extreme. Nor can their feeble attempt to use Bakunin to generalise about all anarchist organisations be taken seriously as Bakunin's organisations were not "major" nor were his ideas on secret organisation and organising followed after his death. They were a product of Bakunin's experiences in Tsarist Russian and not generic to anarchism (as the SWP know fine well).

Moreover, many people leave the SWP due to its undemocratic, authoritarian and bureaucratic nature. The comments by one group of ex-SWP dissidents indicate the hypocrisy of the SWP's attack on Bakunin:

"The SWP is not democratic centralist but bureaucratic centralist. The leadership's control of the party is unchecked by the members. New perspectives are initiated exclusively by the central committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition, implicit or explicit, legitimate or otherwise.

"Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees -- any elections that take place are carried out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership. Any members who have doubts or disagreements are written off as 'burnt out' and, depending on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled.

[. . .]

"The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up before the delegates even set out from their branches. At every level of the party, strategy and tactics are presented from the top down, as pre-digested instructions for action. At

every level, the comrades 'below' are seen only as a passive mass to be shifted into action, rather than as a source of new initiatives." [ISG, **Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades**]

They argue that a "democratic" party would involve the "[r]egular election of all party full-timers, branch and district leadership, conference delegates, etc. with the right of recall," which means that in the SWP appointment of full-timers, leaders and so on is the norm. They argue for the "right of branches to propose motions to the party conference" and for the "right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents." They stress the need for "an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership bodies that exercise discipline), and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference." They argue that in a democratic party "no section of the party would have a monopoly of information" which indicates that the SWP's leadership is essentially secretive, withholding information from the party membership. [Op. Cit.] As can be seen, the SWP have little grounds on which to attack Bakunin given this damning account of its internal workings.

Other dissidents argue the same point. In 1991 members in Southampton SWP asked "When was the last time a motion or slate to conference was opposed?" and pointed out that the "CC usually stays the same or changes by one member. Most of the changes to its composition are made between Conferences. None of the CC's numerous decisions made over the preceding year are challenged or brought to account. Even the Pre-Conference bulletins contain little disagreements." They stress that there "is real debate within the SWP, but the framework for discussion is set by the Central Committee. The agenda's national events . . . are set by the CC or its appointees and are never challenged . . . Members can only express their views through Conference and Council to the whole party indirectly." [quoted by Trotwatch, **Carry On Recruiting!**, p. 39 and pp. 40-1]

Therefore, the SWP does not really have a leg to stand on. While Bakunin's ideas on organisation are far from perfect, the actual practice of the SWP places their comments in context. They attack Bakunin while acting in similar ways while claiming they do not. Anarchists do not hold up Bakunin's ideas on how anarchists should organise themselves as examples to be followed nor as particularly democratic (in contrast to his ideas on how the labour movement and revolution should be organised, which we **do** recommend) -- as the SWP know. However, the SWP claim they are a revolutionary party and yet their organisational practices are deeply anti-democratic with a veneer of (bourgeois) democracy. The hypocrisy is clear.

Ironically, the ISG dissidents who attack the SWP for being "bureaucratic centralist" note that "[a]nybody who has spent time involved in 'Leninist' organisations will have come across workers who agree with Marxist politics but refuse to join the party because they believe it to be undemocratic and authoritarian. Many draw the conclusion that Leninism itself is at fault, as every organisation that proclaims itself Leninist appears to follow the same pattern." [**Lenin vs. the SWP: Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?**] This is a common refrain with Leninists -- when reality says one thing and the theory another, it must be reality that is at fault. Yes, every Leninist organisation may be bureaucratic and authoritarian but it is not the theory's fault that those who apply it are not capable of actually doing so. Such an application of scientific principles by the followers of "scientific socialism" is worthy of note -- obviously the usual scientific method of

generalising from facts to produce a theory is inapplicable when evaluating "scientific socialism" itself.

One last point. While some may argue that the obvious parallels between Bakunin's ideas and Lenin's should embarrass anarchists, most anarchists disagree. This is for four reasons.

Firstly, anarchists are **not** "*Bakuninists*" or followers of "*Bakuninism*." This means that we do not blindly follow the ideas of individuals, rather we take what we find useful and reject the flawed and non-libertarian aspects of their ideas. Therefore, if we think Bakunin's specific ideas on how revolutionaries should organise are flawed and not libertarian then we reject them while keeping the bulk of Bakunin's useful and libertarian ideas as inspiration. We do not slavishly follow individuals or their ideas but apply critical judgement and embrace what we find useful and reject what we consider nonsense.

Secondly, anarchism did not spring fully formed out of Bakunin's (or Proudhon's or Kropotkin's or whoever's) mind. We expect individuals to make mistakes, not to be totally consistent, not totally break with their background. Bakunin clearly did not manage to break completely with his background as a political exile and an escapee from Tsarist Russia. Hence his arguments and support for secret organisation -- his experiences, like Lenin's, pushed him in that direction. Moreover, we should also remember that Russia was not the only country which the anarchist and labour movements were repressed during this time. In France, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, the International was made illegal. The Spanish section of the International had been proscribed in 1872 and the central and regional authorities repressed it systematically from the summer of 1873, forcing the organisation to remain underground between 1874 and 1881. As can be seen, the SWP forget the historical context when attacking Bakunin's secrecy.

Thirdly, Bakunin did not, like Lenin, think that "socialist consciousness" had to be introduced into the working class from outside by bourgeois intellectuals. He argued that due to the "*economic struggle of labour and capital*" a worker who joined the International Workers' Association "*would inevitably discover, through the very force of circumstances and through the develop of this struggle, the political, socialist, and philosophical principles of the International.*" He thought that working class people were "**socialists without knowing it**" as "*their most basic instinct and their social situation makes them . . . earnestly and truly socialist . . . They are socialist because of all the conditions of their material existence and all the needs of their being. . . The workers lack neither the potential for socialist aspirations nor their actuality; they lack socialist thought.*" Thus the "*germs*" of "*socialist thought*" are to "*be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal . . . is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants.*" The method? The class struggle itself -- "*the International relies on the collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, pp. 100-3]

Bakunin did not deny the importance of those who already are socialists to organise themselves and "*influence*" those who were not socialists so that in "*critical moments*" they will "*follow the International's lead.*" However, this influence was **not** to inject socialist ideas into the working class but rather to aid their development by the "*propagation of*" the International's "*ideas and . . . the organisation of its members' natural effect on the masses.*" As can be seen, Bakunin's ideas on this subject differ considerably from Lenin's. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139 and p. 140]

Unsurprisingly, the programme of the revolutionary organisation had to reflect the instincts and needs of the working population and must never be imposed on them. As he argued, the working masses were *"not a blank page on which any secret society can write whatever it wishes . . . It has worked out, partly consciously, probably three-quarters unconsciously, its own programme which the secret society must get to know or guess and to which it must adapt itself."* He stresses that once the state *"is destroyed . . . the people will rise . . . for their own [ideal]"* and anyone *"who tries to foist his own programme on the people will be left holding the baby."* [quoted by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, p. 252, p. 254 and p. 256] As he stresses, libertarian socialist ideas come from the masses and not from outside them:

"In opposition to . . . oppressive statist orientations . . . an entirely new orientation finally arose from the depths of the proletariat itself . . . It proceeds directly to the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes . . . and the abolition of their last buttress, the state."

"That is the program of social revolution." [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48-9]

Therefore, for Bakunin, the revolutionary organisation did not play the same role as for Lenin. It existed to aid the development of socialist consciousness within the working class, not inject that consciousness into a mass who cannot develop it by their own efforts. The difference is important as Lenin's theory justified the substitution of party power for workers power, the elimination of democracy and the domination of the party over the class it claimed to represent. Bakunin, recognising that socialist ideas are *"instinctive"* in the working class due to their position in society and their everyday experiences, could not do this as the organisation existed to clarify these tendencies, not create them in the first place and inject them into the masses.

Lastly, the role the organisation plays in the workers' movement and revolution are distinctly different. As Bakunin constantly stressed, the secret organisation must never take state power. As he put it, the *"main purpose and task of the organisation"* would be to *"help the people to achieve self-determination."* It would *"not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character"* and *"not placed above the people like state power."* Its programme *"consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people"* and its influence is *"not contrary to the free development and self-determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power."* Thus the revolutionary group would be the *"helper"* of the masses, with an *"organisation within the people itself."* [quoted by Michael Confino, **Op. Cit.**, p. 259, p. 261, p. 256 and p. 261] The revolution itself would see *"an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments -- a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, . . . universal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states."* [Bakunin, **Statism and Anarchy**, p. 33]

As can be seen, instead of seeking state power, as Lenin's party desired, Bakunin's would seek "natural influence" rather than "official influence." As we argued in [section J.3.7](#), this meant influencing the class struggle and revolution within the mass assemblies of workers' associations and communes and in their federations. Rather than seek state power and official leadership positions, as the Leninist party does, Bakunin's organisation rejected the taking of hierarchical positions in favour of working at the base of the organisation and providing a "leadership of ideas" rather than of people (see [section J.3.6](#)). While Bakunin's organisational structures are flawed from a libertarian perspective (although more democratic than Marxists claim) the way it works within popular organisations is libertarian and in stark contrast with the Leninist position which sees these bodies as stepping stones for party power.

Therefore, Bakunin rejected key Leninist ideas and so cannot be considered as a forefather of Bolshevism in spite of similar organisational suggestions. The similarity in structure is due to a similarity in political conditions in Russia and **not** similarities in political ideas. If we look at Bakunin's ideas on social revolution and the workers' movement we see a fully libertarian perspective -- of a movement from the bottom-up, based on the principles of direct action, self-management and federalism. Anarchists since his death have applied **these** ideas to the specific anarchist organisation as well, rejecting the non-libertarian elements of Bakunin's ideas which the SWP correctly (if somewhat hypocritically and dishonestly) denounce.

22. Was the F.A.I. a "centralised and secret" organisation that shunned "open debate and common struggle"?

After getting Bakunin's ideas on the organisation of revolutionaries wrong, the SWP move onto getting Spanish Anarchism wrong:

"The anarchist organisation inside the Spanish C.N.T., the F.A.I., was centralised and secret. A revolutionary party thrives on open debate and common struggle with wider groups of workers."

We discuss this Marxist myth in more detail in [section 3](#) of the appendix on "[Marxists and Spanish Anarchism](#)". However a few points are worth making here. The F.A.I., regardless of what the SWP assert, was not centralised. It was a federation of autonomous affinity groups. As one member put it:

"It was never its aim to act as a leadership or anything of the sort -- to begin with they had no slogans, nor was any line laid down, let alone any adherence to any hierarchical structure . . . This is what outside historians ought to grasp once and for all: that neither Durruti, nor Ascaso, nor Garcia Oliver -- to name only the great C.N.T. spokesmen -- issued any watchwords to the 'masses,' let alone delivered any operational plan or conspiratorial scheme to the bulk of the C.N.T. membership."
[quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 25]

He stressed that "[e]ach F.A.I. group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding . . . they had no . . . opportunity or jurisdiction . . . to foist a party line upon the grass-roots." [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28]

Murray Bookchin paints a similar picture:

"The F.A.I. . . . was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks. . . They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies -- a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.

"The F.A.I., moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed 'line' like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all faistas could mechanically guide their actions." [The Spanish Anarchists, p. 224]

Stuart Christie argues that the decentralised nature of the F.A.I. helped it survive the frequent repression directed against it and the C.N.T:

"The basic units of the F.A.I. were . . . small autonomous affinity groups of anarchist militants. This cohesive quasi-cellular form of association had evolved, gradually, over the period of time it takes for relationships to be established and for mutual trust to grow. The affinity groups consisted, usually, of between three and 10 members bound by ties of friendship, and who shared well defined aims and agreed methods of struggle. Once such a group had come into existence it could, if it so wished, solicit affiliation to the F.A.I. . . . The affinity groups were also highly resistant to police infiltration. Even if infiltration did occur, or police agents did manage to set up their own 'affinity' groups it would not have been a particularly efficient means of intelligence gathering; the atomic structure of the F.A.I. meant there was no central body to provide an overview of the movement as a whole." [We, the Anarchists!, p. 28]

He stresses its decentralised and federal nature:

*"Above all, it was not a representative body and involved **no** delegation of power either within the affinity groups or in the regional or national administrative bodies to empower those bodies to make decisions on behalf of the collectivity. Drawing on many years of revolutionary experience the F.A.I. was firmly rooted in federal principles and structured in such a way that its co-ordinating function did not deprive its constituent members of their autonomous power . . . In situations where it was necessary for delegates to take decisions, e.g. at plenary meetings during times of crisis or clandestinity, those decisions were required to be ratified by the whole membership who, in effect, constituted the administration . . . The groups in a city or town constituted a Local Federation while the rural groups, combined, formed a District Federation. These were administered by a secretariat and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. The Local and District Federations were obliged to convene regular assemblies of all groups in its area . . . Local and District Federations constituted a Regional Federation. These, in turn, were co-ordinated by a Peninsular Committee. None of these committees, local, district, regional or national, could be described as having a bureaucratic apparatus. Nor did they wield executive power of any description. Their function was purely administrative." [Op. Cit., pp. 29-30]*

Therefore, the claim that the F.A.I. was a centralised organisation is simply false. Rather it was a federation of autonomous groups, as can be seen. That the SWP and other Leninists assert otherwise is perhaps due to their faith in the efficiency of centralism -- as the F.A.I. was a very effective grouping, their prejudices lead them to the (false) claim that it was centralised

Was the F.A.I. a "*secret*" organisation? When it was founded in 1927, Spain was under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and so it was illegal and secret by necessity. As Stuart Christie correctly notes, "*[a]s an organisation publicly committed to the overthrow of the dictatorship, the F.A.I. functioned, from 1927 to 1931, as an illegal rather than a secret organisation. From the birth of the Republic in 1931 onwards, the F.A.I. was simply an organisation which, until 1937, refused to register as an organisation as required by Republican Law.*" [We, the Anarchists!, p. 24] Thus it was illegal rather than secret. As one anarchist militant asked@ "*If it was secret, how come I was able to attend F.A.I. meetings without ever having joined or paid dues to the 'specific' organisation?*" [quoted by Christie, Op. Cit., p. 24]

Moreover, given the periods of repression suffered by the Spanish libertarian movement throughout its history (including being banned and forced underground) being an illegal organisation made perfect sense. So the anarchist movement was made illegal a number of times, nor did the repression end during the Republic of 1931-6 with failed revolutionary attempts resulting in massive arrests and the closing of union halls. Again, the SWP ignore historical context and so mislead their readers.

Did the F.A.I. ignore "*open debate and common struggle.*" No, of course not. The members of the F.A.I. were also members of the C.N.T. The C.N.T. was based around mass assemblies in which all members could speak. It was here that members of the F.A.I. took part in forming C.N.T. policy along with other C.N.T. members. Anarchists in the C.N.T. who were not members of the F.A.I. indicate this. Jose Borrás Casacarosa notes that "*[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants . . . the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants.*" Jose Campos notes that F.A.I. militants "*tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions . . . if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the faista in open assembly.*" [quoted by Stuart Christie, Op. Cit., p. 62] As Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. in his own right) put it:

"There is not a single militant who as a 'F.A.I.ista' intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers' union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the F.A.I. or not." [cited by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 137]

This meant that it was at union meetings and congresses where policies and the programme for the movement were argued out: "*delegates, whether or not they were members of the F.A.I., were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and*

given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions." [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I.**, p. 121]

As can be seen, open debate with their fellow workers in the union assemblies. In this they followed Bakunin's arguments that anarchist organisation *"rules out any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power"* and it *"will promote the Revolution only through the natural but never official influence of all members of the Alliance."* This influence would be exerted in the union assemblies, as the union members *"could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies . . . In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed"*. This would ensure that the assemblies had *"real autonomy"* and actually were the real power in the organisation. Any committees would be made up of *"delegates who conscientiously fulfilled all their obligations to their respective sections as stipulated in the statutes," "reporting regularly to the membership the proposals made and how they voted"* and *"asking for further instructions (plus instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates)"* [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 154, p. 387 and p. 247]

The anarchist revolution would be organised in an identical fashion, and, in Bakunin's words, *"must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations . . . organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegations"* who *"will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 172]

As can be seen, the F.A.I. (like all anarchists) influenced the class struggle and revolution via their natural influence in winning debates with their fellow workers in union assemblies. They did not seek power but rather influence for their ideas. To claim otherwise, to claim that anarchists reject open debate with our fellow workers is false. Instead of seeking to power -- and so limiting debates to during elections -- anarchists argue that people must control their own organisations (and so the revolution) directly and all the time. This means, as can be seen, we encourage open debate and discussion far more than those, like the SWP, who seek centralised political power for themselves. In such a system, the only people who debate regularly are the members of the government -- everyone else is just a voter and an order taker.

23. Do anarchists wait for "*spontaneous upsurges by workers*"?

After lying about the F.A.I., the SWP move on to lying about anarchist theory:

"Anarchists instead look to spontaneous upsurges by workers. In the struggle anarchists will declare themselves and urge the workers on. They hope this will lead to the toppling of capitalism. History is full of mass struggles which have been able to win significant gains, but which have not had a clear leadership that can carry the struggle over to victory against capitalism."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Their own article exposes their lies. They mention the mass syndicalist union the C.N.T., which was organised in an anarchist way and in which anarchists were heavily involved. Anarchists from Bakunin onward have all argued in favour of organising as anarchists as well as organising workers and fighting for reforms in the here and now. For Bakunin, *"the natural organisation of the masses . . . is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association."* [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] He stressed the importance of anarchists being involved in unions as well as union struggle for reforms by direct action:

"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution . . . the International will give labour unrest in all countries an essentially economic character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the association of the working masses . . . It will [also] propagandise its principles . . ." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 109]

Indeed, he saw the labour movement as the means to create a socialist society:

"The masses are a force, or at least the essential elements of a force. What do they lack? They lack two things which up till now constituted the power of all government: organisation and knowledge."

"The organisation of the International [Workers' Association], having for its objective not the creation of new despotisms but the uprooting of all domination, will take on an essentially different character from the organisation of the State. . . But what is the organisation of the masses? . . . It is the organisation by professions and trades . . . The organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour . . . bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself." [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 254-5]

All anarchists have stressed the importance of working in and outside the labour movement to gain influence for anarchist ideas of direct action, solidarity, self-management and federalism in the here and now, rather than waiting for a *"spontaneous uprising"* to occur. As Kropotkin argued, *"Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda with Labour Unions had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist [or libertarian] . . . section of the International Working Men's Association."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 119] Malatesta makes the same point:

"anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideas. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way."

"Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps unorganisable, masses to awaken a spirit of revolt and the desire and"

hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future." [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 109]

Therefore, as can be seen, the SWP's assertions are totally at odds with the actual ideas of anarchists, as would be known by anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchist theory. After all, if spontaneous uprisings were sufficient in themselves we would be living in an anarchist society as Bakunin argued: *"if instinct alone had been sufficient for the liberation of peoples, they would have long since freed themselves."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 254] This explains why anarchists organise **as anarchists** in groups and federations to influence the class struggle. We are aware of the need for revolutionaries to organise to influence the class struggle, spread anarchist ideas and tactics and present the case for revolutionary change. An anarchist society will not come about by accident, it must be consciously desired and created by the mass of the population. As Kropotkin argued:

"Communist organisations . . . must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free." [Anarchism, p. 140]

So, clearly, anarchists see the importance of working class organisation and struggle in the here and now. Anarchists are active in industrial disputes and (as the SWP note) the anti-globalisation movement and were heavily involved in the anti-poll-tax and anti-Criminal Justice Act struggles in the UK, for example. The role of anarchists is not to wait for *"upsurges"* but rather to encourage them by spreading our ideas and encouraging workers to organise and fight their bosses and the state. It is for this reason anarchists form groups and federations, to influence workers today rather than waiting for a *"spontaneous uprising"* to occur. Moreover, it is quite ironic that the SWP say that anarchists wait for upsurges before declaring themselves to the masses. After all, that is what the SWP do. They turn up at picket lines and try and sell their paper and party to the strikers. Obviously, if anarchist do this, it is bad, if the SWP do it, then it is *"revolutionary."*

Therefore, rather than believing in or waiting for *"spontaneous upsurges"* anarchists, like the SWP, spread their message within and outwith social struggles and popular organisations, try and convince people to become revolutionaries. That is why there are numerous anarchist federations across the world, involved in numerous struggles and working class organisations, with magazines, papers and leaflets being produced and distributed, websites created and so on. Anarchists stress the importance of winning people over to anarchist ideas and of giving a *"lead"* in struggle rather than as a *"leadership"* (which implies a hierarchical relationship between the mass of people and a group of leaders). To state otherwise, to argue we wait for spontaneous uprisings, is simply a lie.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, not leaders. As Voline argued, the politically aware minority *"should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances"*, they *"should freely participate in the common work, as true collaborators, not as dictators. It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves . . . without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone . . . Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class*

*organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated. . . should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution. . . As for the 'elite' [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to **help** the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action -- **but not to direct them governmentally.**" [The Unknown Revolution, pp. 177-8]*

Sadly, Leninists like the SWP confuse giving a lead with taking power themselves. They seek to take over positions of responsibility in a movement and turn them into positions of power which they can use to tell the others what to do. Instead of being the servants of the organisation, they become its masters. For this reason anarchist organisations try to influence movements from below, in the mass assemblies which make it up, rather than seek power.

24. Do anarchists blame workers "for being insufficiently revolutionary"?

After creating a straw man about anarchist theory, the SWP draw some thoughts from it:

"When struggles have not spontaneously broken capitalism, anarchists have tended to end up blaming workers for being insufficiently revolutionary. So 19th century French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon started off talking of his 'love of the people' but ended up saying he 'despised' humanity because they had not overthrown capitalism."

Strange that they picked Proudhon as he was not a revolutionary anarchist. Rather he favoured the reform of capitalism via mutual credit and workers' co-operatives and rejected the idea of "uprisings" and revolution (spontaneous or not). Anyone with even a limited knowledge of Proudhon's work would know this. In addition, Proudhon's last book (**The Political Capacity of the Working Classes**), finished on his death bed, was an attempt to influence the workers' movement towards his ideas of mutualism and federalism. Hardly to be expected from someone who "*despised*" humanity for not overthrowing capitalism. As examples go, the SWP is clearly clutching at straws.

Moreover, as we argued in the [last section](#), revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Rocker, etc., all placed a great deal of time and energy in trying to work within and influence workers' struggles and the labour movement in the here and now. They did not think that workers struggles would necessarily "spontaneously" break capitalism. While recognising, as we indicated in [section 10](#), that the class struggle changed the ideas of those involved, they recognised the need for anarchist groups to influence the class struggle in a libertarian way and towards a revolution. They were well aware that "spontaneous" uprisings occurred but were not enough in themselves -- anarchists would need to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle, particularly when "uprisings" were not occurring and the daily struggle between governed and governor, exploited and exploiter was taking less spectacular forms (hence anarchist support and involvement in the labour movement and unions like the C.N.T.).

The SWP then move onto an even greater factual error. They claim that the "*biggest anarchist groups today, the 'autonomists' in Europe, treat workers who have not fully broken with capitalist ideas as an enemy rather than a potential ally.*" Unfortunately for them, the "autonomists" are not generally anarchists (the name should have given the SWP some clue,

as anarchists are quite proud of their name and generally use it, or libertarian, to describe themselves). Rather the "autonomists" are non-Leninist Marxists whose ideas (and name) originally came from the Marxist left in Italy during the 1960s. It is also probable that the various European anarchist federations (such as the French and Italian) and anarcho-syndicalist unions are bigger than the autonomists. However, without any examples of the groups meant it is hard to evaluate the accuracy of the SWP's claims as regards their size or opinions. Suffice it to say, the leading theorists of "autonomism" such as Toni Negri and Harry Cleaver do not express the opinions the SWP claim "autonomists" have.

25. Why does the history of centralised parties refute the SWP's arguments?

The SWP admit that their analysis leaves much to be desired by mentioning that "[m]any anarchists understand the way that capitalism works and organise to change the world." In other words, if an anarchist points out the flaws in their argument or a reader knows an anarchist who does not match the SWP's distorted picture, then the SWP can say that they are part of the "many." An extremely handy, if dishonest, comment to make.

The SWP continue by arguing that our *"rejection of centralisation means that at critical moments their intervention in the struggle is fatally flawed."* This is ironic. Given that their example of the benefits of centralisation showed the flaws in that method of organising, their conclusion seems without basis. Moreover, as argued above, centralisation is the key means by which minorities govern majorities. It is a tool used to impose minority rule and is not designed for other uses. But, then again, the SWP do aim for minority rule -- the rule of the "revolutionary" party over the masses. As they argue:

"The working class needs what anarchism rejects - a clear and determined revolutionary party which can lead the working class as a whole, and is not afraid to overthrow capitalism and set up a workers' state."

Yes, indeed. The examples of the current anti-capitalist movement, the poll tax revolt and the 1917 February Russian revolution indicate well that a revolutionary party works. If such a party had led the working class in each of these events, they would not have occurred. The workers would have done nothing, as the Bolsheviks desired. People would have paid their poll tax waiting for the trade union bureaucrats to act. The anti-globalisation demonstrations would not have happened as the "vanguard" party did not recognise their importance.

As discussed in [section H.6](#), the Russian Revolution quickly resulted in the marginalisation of the workers' councils by the centralised, *"clear and determined"* Bolsheviks who turned them into rubber stamps of their government, so suggesting that the politics of the SWP leave much to be desired. Given that the one "success" of Leninist politics -- the Russian Revolution of October 1917 -- created state capitalism, with workers' soviets and factory committees undermined in favour of party power (**before**, we must stress, the start of the civil war -- what most Leninists blame the rise of Stalinism on) we may suggest that **anarchist** ideas have been proven correct again and again. After all, the validity of a theory surely lies in its ability to **explain** and **predict** events. Anarchists, for example, predicted both the degeneration of both Social Democracy and the Russian revolution, the two main examples of Marxism in action, and presented coherent reasons **why** this would happen. Marxists have

had to generate theories to explain these events **after** they have occurred, theories which conveniently ignore the role of Marxist politics in historical events.

This, we suggest, provides the explanation of why they have spent so much time re-writing history and smearing anarchism. Not being able to discuss our ideas honestly -- for that would expose the authoritarian ideas of Bolshevism and its role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution -- the SWP invent a straw man they call anarchism and beat it to death. Unfortunately for them, anarchists are still around and can expose their lies for what they are.