

An Anarchist FAQ

Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's *"Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"*

Contents

Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's <i>"Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"</i>	2
1. Why should <i>"the so-called Anarchistic youth of today"</i> be concerned that Trotskyists consider them allies?	2
2. What else do people learn about when they discover anarchism is not <i>"utter rebellion"</i> ? 4	
3. What do anarchists think will <i>"replace the smashed state machine"</i> ?.....	5
4. What did Trotsky and Lenin think must replace the bourgeois state?	7
5. Is the "proletarian 'state'" really a new kind of state?	10
6. Do anarchists <i>"hope the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution"</i> ? ...	13
7. Are Anarchists simply <i>"potential Marxists"</i> ?	16
8. Is Marxism scientific?	18
9. What does the Russian Revolution tell us about Trotskyism?.....	19
10. Do anarchists reject "leadership"?	22
11. Does the Spanish Revolution show anarchism is flawed?	25
12. Does anarchism believe in spontaneous revolution?	26

Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's *"Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"*

On the Trotskyist "New Youth" webpage there is an article entitled ["Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism"](#) by John Fisher. This article contains numerous distortions of anarchist ideas and positions. Indeed, he makes so many basic errors that only two possible explanations are possible: either he knows nothing about anarchism or he does and is consciously lying.

We will compare his assertions to what anarchist theory actually argues in order to show that this is the case. We will leave it to the reader to determine whether it is a case of ignorance or deceit.

1. Why should *"the so-called Anarchistic youth of today"* be concerned that Trotskyists consider them allies?

Fisher starts his diatribe against anarchism with some thoughts on the radical youth active in the anti-globalisation demonstrations and movements:

"The so-called Anarchistic youth of today, year 2001, for the most part simply use the term 'Anarchist' as an indication of not wanting to go along with the 'system' in not wanting to assimilate, which is a giant leap forward on their part considering all their lives they've constantly been bombarded with the huge American Corporate propaganda machine. For this achievement, they are already more our ally than our enemy."

It makes you wonder how Fisher knows this. Has there been a poll of "anarchistic youth" recently? It would be interesting to discover the empirical basis for this statement. Given the quality of the rest of the article, we can hazard a guess and say that these comments are just assertions and express wishful thinking rather than any sort of reality.

Looking at history, these *"anarchistic youth"* had better watch out. Anarchists know what happens to the *"ally"* of the vanguard party once that party takes power. We remember the fate of our comrades when Lenin and Trotsky ruled the "proletarian" state.

The Russian anarchists were at the forefront of the struggle between the February and October revolutions in 1917. As socialist historian Samuel Farber notes, the anarchists *"had actually been an unnamed coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution."* [Before Stalinism, p. 126] The anarchists were the *"ally"* of the Bolsheviks before they took power as both shared the goals of abolishing the provisional government and for a social revolution which would end capitalism.

This changed once the Bolsheviks had taken power. On the night of April 11th, 1918, the Cheka surrounded 26 Anarchist clubs in Moscow, in the ensuing fighting Anarchists suffered 40 casualties and 500 were taken prisoner. The Petrograd anarchists protested this attack:

"The Bolsheviks have lost their senses. They have betrayed the proletariat and attacked the anarchists. They have joined . . . the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. They have declared war on revolutionary anarchism . . . We regarded you [Bolsheviks] as our revolutionary brothers. But you have proved to be traitors. You are Cains -- you have killed your brothers . . . There can be no peace with the traitors to the working class. The executioners of the revolution wish to become the executioners of anarchism." [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 113]

Fifteen days later similar raids were carried out in Petrograd. This repression, we must note, took place months before the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (in late May 1918). In May of that year, leading anarchist periodicals (including **Burevestnik**, **Anarkhia** and **Golos Truda**) were closed down by the government. The repression continued during the war and afterwards. Many imprisoned anarchists were deported from the "workers' state" in 1921 after they went on hunger strike and their plight was raised by libertarian delegates to the founding congress of the Red International of Labour Unions held that year.

Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks denied they held anarchists. French anarchist Gaston Leval accounted how Lenin had *"reiterated the charges made by Dzerzhinsky [founder of the Bolshevik's secret police, the Cheka] . . . Those in prison were not true anarchists nor idealists -- just bandits abusing our good intentions."* Leval, having gathered the facts, indicated this was not true, making Lenin backtrack. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 213] When the libertarian delegates to the congress reported back on conditions in Russia to their unions, they withdrew from the Trade-Union International.

In the Ukraine, the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement also became an "ally" with the Bolsheviks in the common struggle against the counter-revolutionary White armies. The Bolsheviks betrayed their allies each time they formed an alliance.

The first alliance was in March 1919 during the struggle against Denikin. In May of that year, two Cheka agents sent to assassinate Makhno (the main leader of the movement) were caught and executed. The following month Trotsky, the commander of the Red Army, outlawed the Makhnovists and Communist troops attacked their headquarters at Gulyai-Polye.

Denikin's massive attack on Moscow in September 1919 saw the shaky alliance resumed in the face of a greater threat. Once Denikin had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ordered the Makhnovists to the Polish front. This was obviously designed to draw them away from their home territory, so leaving it defenceless against Bolshevik dictatorship. The Makhnovists refused and Trotsky, again, outlawed and attacked them.

Hostilities were again broken off when the White General Wrangel launched a major offensive in the summer of 1920. Again the Bolsheviks signed a pact with Makhno. This promised amnesty for all anarchists in Bolshevik prisons, freedom for anarchist propaganda, free participation to the Soviets and *"in the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management."* [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 177-9] Once Wrangel had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ripped up the agreement and turned their forces, again, against their "ally" and finally drove them out of the Soviet Union in 1921.

These events should be remembered when the authoritarian left argue that we aim for the same thing and are allies.

2. What else do people learn about when they discover anarchism is not "*utter rebellion*"?

Fisher continues:

"In some cases, 'Anarchist' youth begin to try to learn about what Anarchism truly is instead of seeing it merely as utter rebellion. They learn Anarchism is a form of Socialism, they learn they have much in common with Marxists, they learn the state must be smashed, they learn the state is a tool of suppression used by one class against another."

They learn much more than this. They learn, for example, about the history of Marxism and how anarchism differs from it.

They learn, for example, about the history of Marxist Social Democracy. Many forget that Social Democracy was the first major Marxist movement, initially formed in Germany in 1875 when the followers of Lassalle and Marx united to create the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). This party followed Marx and Engels recommendations that workers should form a distinct political party and conquer political power. It rejected the anarchist argument that workers should "*abstain from politics*" (i.e. elections) and instead, to use an expression from Marx's preamble of the French Workers' Party, turn the franchise "*from a means of deception . . . into an instrument of emancipation.*" [**Marx and Engels Reader**, p. 566]

Rather than confirm Marx's politics, Social Democracy confirmed Bakunin's. It quickly degenerated into reformism. As Bakunin predicted, when "*the workers . . . send common workers . . . to Legislative Assemblies . . . [t]he 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]

From the early 1890s, Social Democracy was racked by arguments between reformists (the "revisionist" wing) and revolutionaries. The former wanted to adapt the party and its rhetoric to what it was actually doing. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the "*distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action.*" [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38] This came to a head in 1914 when the majority of social democrats in Germany and across the world supported their state in the imperialist slaughter of the First World. This disgraceful end would not have surprised Bakunin.

Anarchists also learn about the Russian Revolution. They learn how Lenin and Trotsky eliminated democracy in the armed forces, in the workplace and in the soviets.

They learn, for example, that the Bolsheviks had disbanded soviets which had been elected with non-Bolshevik majorities in the spring and summer of 1918. [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 24]

They learn that at the end of March, 1918, Trotsky proclaimed that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree"* in the Red Army. [**How the Revolution Armed**, vol. 1, p. 47]

They learn that Lenin opposed workers' management of production. Before the October Revolution he saw "workers' control" purely as *"country-wide, all-embracing workers' control over the capitalists"*. [**The Lenin Anthology**, p. 402] He did not see it in terms of workers' management of production itself (i.e. the abolition of wage labour) via federations of factory committees. Anarchists and the workers' factory committees did. *"On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial **and** control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them."* [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38] Lenin himself quickly supported *"one-man management"* invested with *"dictatorial powers"* after *"control over the capitalists"* failed. By 1920, Trotsky was advocating the *"militarisation of labour"* and implemented his ideas on the railway workers.

They learn that Leninism is just another form of capitalism (state capitalism). As Lenin put it, socialism *"socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly . . . 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."* [**Op. Cit.**, vol. 25, p. 358]

They learn that Lenin and Trotsky argued for party dictatorship and centralised, top-down rule (see [section 4](#)).

They also learn that this should not come as a surprise. Anarchism argues that the state is a tool to allow minorities to rule and has been designed to ensure minority power. They learn that it cannot, by its very nature, be a tool for liberation -- no matter who is in charge of it.

3. What do anarchists think will *"replace the smashed state machine"*?

Fisher makes a common Marxist assertion:

"But what they do not learn, and never will from an Anarchist perspective is what is to replace the smashed state machine?"

In reality, if you read anarchist thinkers you will soon discover what anarchists think will "replace" the state: namely the various working class organisations created by the class struggle and revolution. In the words of Kropotkin, the *"elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses."* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 175] He stressed that *"[to] make a revolution it is not . . . enough that there should be . . . [popular] risings . . . It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established."* [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200]

Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the process of the revolution itself. As such, as Kropotkin put it, *"[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate*

on the ruins of the old forms . . . It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it." [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 101-2] So while the specific forms these organisations would take cannot be predicted, their general nature can be.

So what is the general nature of these new organisations? Anarchists have consistently argued that the state would be replaced by a free federation of workers' associations and communes, self-managed and organised from the bottom-up. In Malatesta's words, anarchy is the *"free organisation from below upwards, from the simple to the complex, through free agreement and the federation of associations of production and consumption."* In particular, he argued anarchists aim to *"push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community"* while the peasants *"should take over the land and produced usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 147 and p. 165]

This vision of revolution followed Bakunin's:

"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]

Similarly, Proudhon argued federations of workers associations and communes to replace the state. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, he saw the germs of anarchy as being the result of *"generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them"* as *"it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave."* What, decades later, Proudhon called an *"Agricultural-Industrial Federation"* in his **Principle of Federation**. Indeed, during the 1848 Revolution he called for *"committees"* to *"be set up to orchestrate exchange, credit and commerce between workers"* across France so that *"a body representative of the proletariat be formed in Paris . . . in opposition to the bourgeoisie's representation."* In this way *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"*. [**Property is Theft!**, , p. 226, p. 225, p. 714 and p. 321]

Kropotkin, unsurprisingly enough, had similar ideas. He saw the revolution as the *"expropriation of the whole of social wealth"* by the workers, who *"will organise the workshops so that they continue production"* once *"the governments are swept out by the people."* The *"coming social revolution"* would see *"the complete abolition of States, and reorganisation from the simple to the complex through the free federation of the popular forces of producers and consumers,"* the *"federation of workers' corporations and groups of consumers."* The *"Commune will know that it must break the State and replace it by the*

Federation" (which is "freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes"). [Words of a Rebel, p. 99, p. 91, p. 92 and p. 83]

Thus "independent Communes for the **territorial** groupings, and vast federations of trade unions for groupings **by social functions** - the two interwoven and providing support to each to meet the needs of society - allowed the anarchists to conceptualise in a real, concrete, way the possible organisation of a liberated society". These "groupings, covering each other like a network, would thus allow the satisfaction of all social needs: consumption, production and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection against aggression, mutual aid, territorial defence". Needless to say, "these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in **their** unions, **their** federations, completely outside the State?" [Kropotkin, **Modern Science and Anarchy**, pp. 164-5]

In his classic history of the French Revolution Kropotkin pointed to "the popular Commune" as an example of the "something new" required to turn an uprising into a revolution. He argued that "the Revolution began by creating the Commune . . . and through this institution it gained . . . immense power." He stressed that it was "by means of the 'districts' [of the Communes] that . . . the masses, accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government." Such a system did not imply isolation, for while "the districts strove to maintain their own independence" they also "sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union." The Commune "was thus made **from below upward**, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative." [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 203]

During the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Kropotkin expressed his support for the soviets created by the workers in struggle. He argued that anarchists should "enter the Soviets, but certainly only as far as the Soviets are organs of the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the state, and not organs of authority." [quoted by Graham Purchase, **Evolution and Revolution**, p. 30] After the 1917 revolution, he re-iterated this point, arguing that "idea of soviets . . . of councils of workers and peasants . . . controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts." [Anarchism, p. 254]

Therefore, Fisher's comments are totally untrue. Anarchists have been clear on this issue from Proudhon onwards (see [section I.2.3](#) for a further discussion of this issue).

4. What did Trotsky and Lenin think must replace the bourgeois state?

Fisher continues his inaccurate attack:

"What we as Marxists explain is what must replace the smashed bourgeois state machine.

"Engels explains that the state is a 'special coercive force'. So what must come after the bourgeoisie is overthrown to keep it down? As Lenin explains in the State and Revolution: the bourgeois state 'must be replaced by a "special coercive force" for the

suppression of the bourgeois by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)' (pg 397 vol. 25 collected works) that is workers' democracy."

There are numerous issues here. First, of course, is the question of how to define the state. Fisher implicitly assumes that anarchists and Marxists share the same definition of what marks a "state." Second, there is the question of whether quoting Lenin's **State and Revolution** without relating it to Bolshevik practice is very convincing. Third, there is the question of the defence of the revolution. We will discuss the second question here, the first in the [next section](#) and the third in [section 6](#).

There is a well-known difference between Lenin's work **The State and Revolution** and actual Bolshevik practice. In the former, Lenin promised the widest democracy, although he also argued that "[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions." Clearly, he saw "democracy" in the normal, bourgeois, sense of electing a government who will make the decisions for the electors. Indeed, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is described as "the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class." ["*The State and Revolution*", **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 306 and p. 337] This "vanguard" is the party:

"By educating the workers' party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of leading the whole people to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie." [Op. Cit., p. 288]

So the vanguard of the oppressed would become the "ruling class", **not** the oppressed. This means that "workers' democracy" is simply reduced to meaning the majority designates its rulers but does not rule itself. As such, the "workers' state" is just the same as any other state (see [next section](#)).

Thus, before taking power Lenin argued for party power, not workers' power. The workers can elect representatives who govern on their behalf, but they do not actually manage society themselves. This is the key contradiction for Bolshevism -- it confuses workers' power with party power.

Post-October, the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky changed. If their works are consulted, it is soon discovered what they thought should "replace" the bourgeois state: party dictatorship. In the words of Lenin from 1920:

"In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers . . . What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat." [Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 20]

He stressed that this was an inevitable aspect of revolution, applicable in all countries:

"the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so

degraded, and so corrupted in parts . . . that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation." [Op. Cit., vol. 32, p. 21]

Zinoviev, a leading Bolshevik, explained to the Second Congress of the Communist International that "[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least! We have a dictatorship of the working class and that is precisely why we also have a dictatorship of the Communist Party. The dictatorship of the Communist Party is only a function, an attribute, an expression of the dictatorship of the working class . . . [T]he dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party." [Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920, vol. 2, pp. 151-2]

Trotsky agreed with this lesson and argued it to the end of his life:

"The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities -- the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history . . . The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution . . . Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses." [Writings 1936-37, pp. 513-4]

Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky are clearly explaining the need for party dictatorship over the working class. This was seen as a **general** lesson of the Russian Revolution. How many Marxists "explain" this to anarchists?

Clearly, then, Fisher is not being totally honest when he argues that Trotskyism is based on "workers' democracy." Lenin, for example, argued in 1921 that "*Marxism teaches -- and this tenet has not only been formally endorsed by the whole of the Communist International in the decisions of the second Congress . . . but has also been confirmed in practice by our revolution -- that only the political party of the working class, i.e. the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass.*" [Op. Cit., vol. 32, p. 246]

Lenin is, of course, rejecting what democracy is all about, namely the right and duty of representative bodies to carry out the wishes of the electors (i.e. their "vacillations"). Instead

of workers' democracy, he is clearly arguing for the right of the party to ignore it and impose its own wishes on the working class.

Trotsky argued along the same lines (again in 1921) when he suggested that the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition *"have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"* He spoke of the *"revolutionary historic birthright of the Party"* and that it *"is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

Needless to say, they did not explain how these lessons and arguments are compatible with Lenin's **The State and Revolution** where he had argued that *"[a]ll officials, without exception,"* must be *"elected and subject to recall at any time."* [The Essential Lenin, p. 302] If they **are** subject to election and recall at any time, then they will reflect the *"passing moods"* (the *"vacillations"*) of the workers' democracy. Therefore, to combat this, soviet democracy must be replaced by party dictatorship and neither Lenin nor Trotsky were shy in both applying and arguing this position.

It is a shame, then, for Fisher's argument that leading Bolsheviks like Lenin, Zinoviev and Trotsky also explained why party dictatorship was more important than workers' democracy. It is doubly harmful for his argument as both argued that this "lesson" was of a **general** nature and applicable for all revolutions.

It is also a shame for Fisher's argument that the Leninists, once in power, overthrew every soviet that was elected with a non-Bolshevik majority (see [section H.6.1](#)). They also repressed those who demanded real workers' democracy (as, for example, in Kronstadt in 1921 (see the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#)) or during the numerous strikes under Lenin's rule (see [section H.6.3](#)).

Clearly, Fisher's account of Trotskyism, like his account of anarchism, leaves a lot to be desired.

5. Is the "proletarian 'state'" really a new kind of state?

Fisher, after keeping his readers ignorant of the reality of Lenin and Trotsky in power, argues that:

"The proletariat 'state' is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word, Lenin explains, because it is no longer the minority suppressing the majority, but the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority! The Proletariat suppressing the Bourgeoisie."

If it is not a state *"in the proper sense of the word"* then why use the term state at all? Marxists argue because its function remains the same -- namely the suppression of one class by another. However, every state that has ever existed has been the organ by which a **minority** ruling class suppresses the majority. As such, the Marxist definition is a-historic in

the extreme and extracts a metaphysical essence of the state rather than producing a definition based on empirical evidence.

In order to show the fallacy of Fisher's argument, it is necessary to explain what anarchists think the state is.

The assumption underlying Fisher's argument is that anarchists and Marxists share identical definitions of what a state is. This is not true. Marxists, as Fisher notes, think of a state as simply as an instrument of class rule and so concentrate solely on this function. Anarchists disagree. While we agree that the main function of the state is to defend class society, we also stress the structure of the state has evolved to ensure that role. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

"[S]ocial institutions . . . do not arise arbitrarily, but are called into being by special needs to serve definite purposes . . . The newly arisen possessing classes had need of a political instrument of power to maintain their economic and social privileges over the masses of their own people . . . Thus arose the appropriate social conditions for the evolution of the modern state, as the organ of political power of privileged castes and classes for the forcible subjugation and oppression of the non-possessing classes . . . Its external forms have altered in the course of its historical development, but its functions have always been the same . . . And just as the functions of the bodily organs of . . . animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass-exploitation and social privileges, and creator of privileged classes." [Anarcho-Syndicalism, pp. 14-5]

This means that the structure of the state has evolved to ensure its function. Organ and role are interwoven. Keep one and the other will develop. And what is the structure (or organ) of the state? For anarchists, the state means *"the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs . . . are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who . . . are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force."* In summary, it *"means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few."* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 17 and p. 42]

This structure has not evolved by chance. It is required by its function as the defender of minority class power. As Kropotkin stressed, the bourgeois needed the state:

"To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more" [Words of a Rebel, p. 143]

This means that to use the structure of the state (i.e., centralised, hierarchical power in the hands of a few) would soon mean the creation of a new minority class of rulers as the state *"could not survive without creating about it a new privileged class."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 37]

Therefore, for a given social organisation to be a state it must be based on delegated **power**. A state is marked by the centralisation of power into a few hands at the top of the structure, in other words, it is hierarchical in nature -- *"The State is necessarily hierarchical, authoritarian - or it ceases to be the State"* [Kropotkin, **Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 227] This is, of course, essential for a minority class to remain control over it. Thus a social system which places power at the base, into the hands of the masses, is not a state as anarchists understand it. As Bakunin argued, *"[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State."* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 223] Therefore, if real workers democracy -- i.e. self-management -- existed, then the state would no longer exist.

The question now arises, does the Marxist "workers' state" meet this definition? As indicated in [section 4](#), the answer is a clear yes. In **The State and Revolution**, Lenin argued that the workers' state would be based on representative democracy. This meant, according to Bakunin, that political power would be *"exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them, which in turn will unfailingly return them to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 255] Rather than "the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority" we have a tiny minority, elected by the majority, suppressing those who disagree with what the government decrees, including those within the class which the state claims to represent. In the words of Lenin:

"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." [**Collected Works**, vol. 42, p. 170]

And who exercises this "revolutionary coercion"? The majority? No, the vanguard. As Lenin argued, *"the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks" lies in "correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers."* He stressed that *"to go so far . . . as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid."* [*"Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder"*, **The Lenin Anthology**, p. 575 and p. 568]

In other words, for Lenin, if the leaders exercised their dictatorship, then so did the masses. Such a position is pure and utter nonsense. If the party leaders govern, then the masses do not. And so the "workers' state" is a state in the normal sense of the word, with the *"minority suppressing the majority."* This was made clear by Trotsky in 1939:

"The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves." [**The Moralists and Sycophants**, p. 59]

Thus the party (a minority) holds power and uses that power against the masses themselves. Little wonder, given that, once in power, the Bolsheviks quickly forgot their arguments in favour of representative democracy and imposed party rule and justified theoretically party dictatorship (see [section 4](#)).

Such a transformation of representative democracy into minority class rule was predicted by anarchists:

"[I]t is not true that once the social conditions are changed the nature and role of government would change. Organ and function are inseparable terms. Take away from an organ its function and either the organ dies or the function is re-established . . . A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put into a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of." [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35-6]

Which, of course, is what happened in Russia and both Lenin and Trotsky defended the imposition of party rule, its need to be beyond public control, by the necessities generated by the revolution (the "vacillations" within the masses meant that democracy, public control, had to be eliminated in favour of party dictatorship).

Therefore, from an anarchist perspective, the so-called "workers' state" is still a state in *"the proper sense of the word"* as it is based on centralised, top-down power. It is based on the tiny minority (the party leaders) governing everyone else and suppressing anyone who disagreed with them -- the vast majority. If the vast majority did have real power then the state would not exist. As the "proletarian" state is based on delegated power, it is still a state and, as such, an instrument of minority class rule. In this case, the minority is the party leaders who will use their new powers to consolidate their position over the masses (while claiming that their rule equals that of the masses).

6. Do anarchists *"hope the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution"*?

Fisher continues his inventions:

"Instead of organising an instrument for the coercion of the bourgeois by the proletariat, the Anarchists wish to simply abolish the state overnight and hope that the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution, an absurd and unrealistic idea."

Yes, it would be, if anarchists actually believed that. Sadly for Fisher, we do not and have stated so on many, many, many occasions. Indeed, to make an assertion like this is to show either a total ignorance of anarchist theory or a desire to deceive.

Anarchists have long argued that a revolution would need to defend itself. In the words of Malatesta:

"But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear. . . [Some people] seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!" [Anarchy, pp. 42-3]

Elsewhere he argued that a revolution would *"reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted. And all this, and whatever else would be required to satisfy public needs and the development of the revolution would be the task of . . . al kinds of committees, local, inter-communal, regional and national congresses which would attend to the co-ordination of social activity . . . The creation of voluntary militia . . . to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution."* [Errico Malatesta: **His Life and Ideas**, pp. 165-6]

He was not alone in this position. Every revolutionary anarchist argued along these lines. Bakunin, for example, clearly saw the need to defend a revolution:

"Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades. . . [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces . . . [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction . . . it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution." [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, pp. 170-1]

And:

*"[L]et us suppose . . . it is Paris that starts [the revolution] . . . Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune . . . All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services . . . and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution."* [Op. Cit., pp. 178-9]

He stressed the need to organise and co-ordinate the defence of the revolution by armed workers:

"Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines . . . In order to defend the

revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt . . . and to federate with them for common defence." [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 142]

Similar ideas can be found in the works of other leading anarchists like Kropotkin, Goldman and Berkman. *"Is the State even necessary for the defence of a territory?"*, asked Kropotkin. *"If armed brigands attack a people, is not that same people, armed with good weapons, the surest rampart to oppose to the foreign aggressor?"* Unsurprisingly, he included *"mutual protection, defence of the territory"* amongst the needs met by the *"groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international"* that would exist in an anarchist society and pointed to the Paris Commune as being *"Anarchist too in the manner in which the people undertook her defence"* as *the battalions of the Federalists, when they went to the fortifications, were simply a population in arms."* In short, a *"people that will itself be the armed strength of the country and which will have afforded armed citizens the requisite cohesion and concerted action, will no longer be susceptible to being ordered around."* [**Direct Struggle Against Capital**, p. 121, p. 163, p. 453 and p. 578] Alexander Berkman, in his classic introduction to anarchism, he devoted a whole chapter to the issue which he helpfully entitled *"Defense of the Revolution"* in which he noted that *"the social revolution . . . will defend itself against invasion from any quarter . . . The armed workers and peasants are the only effective defence of the revolution. By means of their unions and syndicates they must always be on guard against counter-revolutionary attack."* [**What is Anarchism?**, pp. 231-2] Emma Goldman clearly and unambiguously stated that she had *"always insisted that an armed attack on the Revolution must be met with armed force"* and that *"an armed counter-revolutionary and fascist attack can be met in no way except by an armed defence."* [**Vision on Fire**, p. 222 and p. 217]

The same can be said of syndicalists, with Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget also seeing the necessity for the *"organisation of defence, with a Trade Union and Federal basis"* in a chapter entitled *"The Arming of the People"* of their classic syndicalist novel. These *"Syndicalist battalions were not a force external to the people. They were the people themselves"* who *"had the common-sense to arm themselves in order to protect their conquered liberty"*. [**How we shall bring about the Revolution**, p. 158] This is reflected in the syndicalist International Workers' Association (IWA) founding principles:

"Although enemies of all forms of organised violence in the hands of any Government, the Syndicalists do not forget that the decisive struggle between the Capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow, will not take place without serious collisions. They recognise violence, therefore, as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of the land. Just as this expropriation cannot be commenced and carried to a successful issue except by the revolutionary economic organisation of the workers, so also the defence of the revolution should be in the hands of these economic organisations, and not in those of the military or other organisations operating outside the economic organs." [*"Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism"*, **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 2, p. 294]

Unsurprisingly, then, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT union (and member of the IWA) recognised the need for defending a revolution in its 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism:

"We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution . . . So . . . the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion . . . or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution. . .

"The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without. . .

"Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence . . . the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence. . . .

"1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.

*"2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world's exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State." [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]*

The CNT put this into practice when *"the widespread strike movement among the workers and peasants after the Fascist revolt in July, 1936, developed into a 'social general strike' (huelga general) and led to armed resistance, and with this to the abolishment of the capitalist economic order and the reorganisation of the economic life by the workers themselves."* As Rudolf Rocker noted in his classic introduction to anarcho-syndicalism, direct action includes the *"armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty."* [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 82 and p. 78]

If it were simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument. Rather the question is one of power -- will power be centralised, held by a handful of leaders and exercised from the top downwards or will it be decentralised and society run from the bottom-up by working people themselves?

Fisher distorts the real issue and instead invents a straw man which has no bearing at all on the real anarchist position (for further discussion, see sections [H.2.1](#) and [J.7.6](#)).

7. Are Anarchists simply "*potential Marxists*"?

After creating the straw man argument that anarchists have not thought about counter-revolution, Fisher asserts:

"The majority of our 'Anarchist' friends never thought about this little loop hole, and as for the rest of them they shrug it off, or say something to the effect of the armed proletariat themselves will stop capitalist reaction, which, an armed proletariat in reality, is a proletarian 'state'! In conclusion our 'Anarchists' are simply potential Marxists who need access to genuinely revolutionary ideas."

Of course, anarchists have thought about this and have come up with, as Fisher puts it, *"the armed proletariat."* Indeed, anarchists have held this position since the days of Bakunin, as we proved in the [last section](#). Is Fisher really suggesting that Bakunin was, in fact, a Marxist? That in itself suggests that the anarchist critique of Marxism and its so-called "proletarian state" is based on something other than an unawareness or rejection that a social revolution would need defending.

Moreover, from an anarchist perspective, an "armed proletariat" is not a "state" as there is not minority of rulers telling the proletariat what to do (see [section 5](#)). The "proletariat" state of Lenin was a real state simply because it was the Bolshevik party leaders who were telling the armed forces of the state what to do and who to repress (including striking workers, anarchists and rebelling peasants). These forces, we must note, were organised from the top-down, with the government appointing officers. It was an "armed proletariat" only in the same sense that the bourgeois army is an "armed proletariat" (i.e. working class people made by the rank and file, fought the battles and followed the orders decided upon by a handful of people at the top).

So, if defence of a revolution by the armed proletariat makes you a Marxist then Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Makhno and Durruti were all "Marxists"! As is every revolutionary anarchist. Needless to say, this is impossible and, as such, Fisher's "little loop hole" in anarchism does not exist.

Clearly, Fisher has no understanding of anarchist thought and prefers invention rather than research.

Our Trotskyist then states that:

"It is our job, as Marxists to explain these ideas to them!"

In other words, the Marxist job is to explain anarchist ideas to anarchists and call them Marxism. How impressive!

Another awkward fact that Fisher does not raise is that the Bolshevik regime did not rest upon *"an armed proletariat"*. Rather, it was based on armed forces separate from the proletariat -- in December 1917, the Bolsheviks created a political police force, the Cheka, and in March 1918 they abolished by decree the election of officers and committees within the newly formed Red Army. As discussed in [section H.6](#), these were used to repress the proletariat, crush its strikes, disband its soviets and so forth, to maintain Bolshevik power. This was a confirmation of Bakunin's warning that *"the State cannot be sure of its own self-preservation without an armed force to defend it against its own **internal enemies**, against the discontent of its own people."* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 265]

Thus, if *"an armed proletariat in reality, is a proletarian 'state'"* then the Bolshevik regime was **not** a *"proletarian 'state'"* and so, ironically, the very regime which Fisher uses to attack

anarchism actually confirms it. Unless, of course, he argues that the Bolshevik regime "*in reality, is [not] a proletarian 'state'*" which seems unlikely. All in all, this shows that any attempt to reduce the anarchist critique of the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" to a question of recognising the need to defend a revolution or not is nothing more than a straw man. Rather, it is a case of how best to defend a social revolution which divides anarchists and Marxists, with the former arguing for empowering and arming the people and the latter for empowering and arming bodies separate from, and ultimately hostile to, the people.

It is the job of anarchists to explain these ideas and facts to Marxists, noting that if they genuinely advocate the arming of the proletariat as the means of defending a social revolution then, in fact, they are closer to anarchism than mainstream Marxism.

8. Is Marxism scientific?

Fisher asserts that "*[a]s Lenin states, 'the ideas of Marx are all powerful, because they are true'! We have the science of dialectics on our side, not idealism, mysticism or theology. Our philosophy is solid as a rock.*"

First, dialectics is not a science. Second, quoting Lenin on the wonders of Marxism is like quoting the Pope on the joys of Catholicism. Third, the only rocks around are in the heads of Trotskyists if they really think this nonsense about anarchism.

Simply put, a science involves investigating the facts of what is being investigated and generating theories based on those facts. Clearly, our Trotskyist has not bothered to discover the facts about anarchism. He has made numerous assertions about anarchism which are contradicted by the works of anarchism. He has, as such, ignored the fundamental nature of science and has, instead, embraced the approach of idealism, mysticism or theology. As Kropotkin -- a world-renown scientist -- notes:

"We have heard much lately of the dialectical method which the social democrats recommend to us for the development of the socialist ideal. But we completely reject this method which, moreover, is not accepted by anyone in the natural sciences. This 'dialectic method' reminds the modern naturalist of something very antiquated - from a past-life and, thankfully, long since forgotten by science. None of the discoveries of the nineteenth century - in mechanics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology or anthropology - was made by the dialectical method. All were made by the inductive method - the only scientific method . . . nowhere did [scientists] hit a point where it was necessary to reject it, to return to the mediaeval scholasticism resuscitated by Hegel." [**Modern Science and Anarchy**, p. 127]

This is not to suggest that dialectics is not without its uses -- after all, Proudhon utilised the interplay of capitalism's contradictions in his economic analysis and critique (in **System of Economic Contradictions** and elsewhere). Yet while Proudhon, Bakunin and Bookchin used dialectics in their works, most anarchists would agree with Kropotkin on both methodology and the nature of dialectics. Its non-scientific nature can be seen from this claim by Lenin:

*"**Aphorism:** It is impossible completely to understand Marx's **Capital**, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the **whole** of*

*Hegel's **Logic**. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"* [**Collected Works**, vol. 38, p. 180]

If that were true, it would mean that Marx was a terrible writer as he could not explain his ideas clearly to an audience without a grounding in German philosophy. It does suggest that dialectics is not a science as it depends not on evidence but rather reading the correct philosophers. It also is a useful excuse for (mainstream) Marxists as it allows the dismissal of the actual history of Marxism in practice for, after all, the so-called Marxists did not understand Marx -- so evidence can be ignored as needs must. It also safeguards Marxism for all actions done in its name -- how many Marxist leaders (never mind activists) have read (or understood) Hegel?

So dialectics is useful to wave away the contradictions within Marxism itself, particularly its practice. In other words, to ignore or dismiss the awkward facts produced by Marxism in action in favour of expounding upon a pure theory which has only been truly understood by an enlightened few (who have read and understood nineteenth century German metaphysics). It should be noted that this analysis is not limited to anarchists -- as libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick suggested it *"was a good thing that Lenin opened Hegel's **Logic**. If he had not, there would not have been a true Marxist for a whole century"* and mocked that *"[u]nfortunately . . . neither Stalin nor any of the other Bolshevik leaders opened Hegel's **Logic**, and thus . . . Leninism became Stalinism and state-capitalism"*. [Paul Mattick, *"A Marxian Oddity"*, **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 3, p. 278]

If Fisher's article is an example of the "science" of Marxism then we can safely state that Marxism is not a science. Rather it is based on invention and slander when discussing anarchism while also showing a shocking ignorance of basic facts about the regime created by the Bolsheviks.

9. What does the Russian Revolution tell us about Trotskyism?

Our Trotskyist decides to quote another Trotskyist, Ted Grant, on the dangers of anarchism but whose implications are deadly to Trotskyist claims:

"However, the setting up of soviets and strike committees -- important as it is -- does not solve the fundamental problem facing the Russian workers. In and of themselves, soviets solve nothing. What is decisive is the party that leads them. In February 1917, the workers and soldiers set up soviets -- a step of enormous importance to the revolution. But in the hands of the Mensheviks and SRs they were reduced to impotence. . . In Germany in November 1918, the soviets were in the hands of the Social Democratic leaders who betrayed the revolution and handed power back to the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the soviets soon dissolved, and were merely transient phenomena. The same would have happened in Russia, if it had not been for the Bolshevik Party and the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky."

Grant is, of course, just paraphrasing Trotsky in his analysis. Moreover, like Trotsky's, his comments indicate the fundamentally dictatorial nature of Trotskyism.

Simply put, if the "leadership" of the party is the key to soviet power, then if the workers' reject that leadership via soviet elections then the Trotskyist is on the horns of a dilemma. Without party "leadership" then the soviets will be "reduced to impotence" and be "merely transient phenomena." To maintain this party "leadership" (and ensure the soviet power) then the democratic nature of the soviets must be undermined. Therefore the Trotskyist is in the ironic situation of thinking that soviet democracy will undermine soviet power.

This dilemma was solved, in practice, during the Russian Revolution -- by the Bolsheviks simply placing party "leadership" above soviet democracy. In other words, they maintained soviet power by turning the soviets into "nothing." Trotsky argued this position numerous times in his life, when he was in power and after he had been expelled from Russia by Stalin.

In 1920, we find Trotsky's thoughts on this subject in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism** where he defended the fact of Communist Party dictatorship:

"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our 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 clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming 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. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole." [**Terrorism and Communism**, p. 109]

Needless to say, this is incredulous. How can the replacement of soviet power by party power mean the "supremacy of labour"? It means the supremacy of the Bolshevik party, not "labour." The transformation of the soviets from genuine democratic organs of working class self-government ("shapeless parliaments of labour") into an instrument of Bolshevik party rule ("the apparatus of the supremacy of labour") cannot be seen as a victory of democracy, quite the reverse. The dictatorship of the Bolshevik party marginalised the soviets just as much as the events of the German Revolution. The only difference is that under the Bolsheviks they maintained a symbolic existence.

Therefore, rather than the "leadership" of the Bolshevik party ensuring soviet rule it meant, in practice, party dictatorship. The soviets played no role in the decision making process as power rested firmly in the hands of the party.

This position was repeated by Trotsky in 1937, in his essay *"Bolshevism and Stalinism."* There he argued that a *"revolutionary party, even having seized power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* He stressed that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that *"[t]hose who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [*"Stalinism and Bolshevism"*, [**Writings 1936-37**, p. 420, p. 426 and p. 430]

So without party dictatorship, the soviets would fall back into the *"mud of reformism."* He argued that the *"political subordination of the soviets by this party to its leaders, has, in itself, abolished the soviet system no more than the domination of the Conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system."* [Op. Cit., p. 426] This analogy is flawed for two reasons.

First, the parliamentary system is based on a division between executive and legislative functions. Lenin argued that the soviet system would, like the Paris Commune, abolish this division and so ensure *"the conversion of the representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies."* [The Essential Lenin, p. 304] If the decisions are being made by the leaders of the Bolshevik party then the soviets represent those leaders, not the people who elected them. As in the bourgeois system, the representatives of the people govern them rather than express the wishes of the people. As such, the idea that the Soviets are organs of working class self-government **has** been abolished. Instead, they are mere "talking shops" with power resting in the hands of the party leadership.

Second, when elections take place parliamentary system it is generally recognised that the majority of representatives can become the government. The system is therefore based on the assumption that the government is accountable to parliament, not parliament to the government. This means that the "domination" of the majority within Parliament is an expression of parliamentary democracy. The majority party does not maintain that only its existence in power ensures that parliamentary democracy can continue, therefore necessitating the suppression of elections. However, that is the position of Trotsky and, let us not forget, the actual actions of the Bolsheviks -- as discussed in [section H.6](#), the Bolsheviks gerrymandered and disbanded soviets to secure their power.

That this is the logical conclusion of Trotsky's position can be seen when he discusses the Kronstadt rebellion of March 1921 (see the appendix on ["What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"](#)). In 1938, he argued that the *"Kronstadt slogan"* was *"soviets without Communists."* [Lenin and Trotsky, **Kronstadt**, p. 90] This, of course, is factually incorrect. The Kronstadt slogan was *"all power to the soviets but not to the parties"*. [Paul Avrich, **Kronstadt 1921**, p. 181] From this incorrect assertion, Trotsky argued as follows:

"to free the soviets from the leadership [!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counterrevolutionary character." [Lenin and Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 90]

Interesting logic. Let us assume that the result of free elections would have been the end of Bolshevik "leadership" (i.e. dictatorship), as seems likely. What Trotsky is arguing is that to allow workers to vote for their representatives would *"only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship"*.

This argument was made (in 1938) as a **general point** and is **not** phrased in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution in 1921. In other words Trotsky is clearly arguing for the dictatorship of the party and contrasting it to soviet democracy. As he put it elsewhere,

the "revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution." [Writings 1936-7, p. 514] So much for "All Power to the Soviets" or "workers' power"!

Clearly, Grant's and Trotsky's arguments contain a deeply undemocratic core. The logic of their position -- namely that party rule is essential to ensure soviet rule -- in practice means that soviet rule is replaced by party dictatorship. To include the masses into the decision making process by soviet democracy means loosening the tight political control of the party on the soviets and allowing the possibility that opposition forces may win in the soviets. However, if that happens then it means the end of soviet power as that is only possible by means of party "leadership." This, in turn, necessitates party dictatorship to maintain "soviet power", as Trotsky and Lenin admitted and implemented.

Simply put, Grant's argument shows the dangers of Trotskyism, not of anarchism.

10. Do anarchists reject "leadership"?

Grant continues by asserting the need for leaders:

"Some say that such a party is not necessary, that the workers do not need a party, that it leads to bureaucracy, and so on. That is a fatal error. The whole history of the international workers' movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party. Anarchism is an expression of impotence, which can offer no way out. Of course, the reason why some honest workers and young people turn towards anarchism is because of their revulsion against Stalinism and the bureaucratic and class collaborationist policies of the existing leaderships, both on the political and trade union field. This is understandable, but profoundly mistaken. The answer to a bad leadership is not no leadership, but to create a leadership that is worthy of the workers' cause. To refuse to do this, to abstain from the political struggle . . . amounts to handing over the workers to the existing leaders without a struggle. In order to combat the policy of class collaboration, it is necessary to pose an alternative in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency."

There are so many fallacies in this argument it is hard to know where to start.

First, we should note that anarchists do not deny the need for "leaders" nor for the need for revolutionaries to organise together to influence the class struggle. To claim so indicates a failure to present the anarchist case honestly. In the words of Kropotkin:

"The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by . . . minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups . . . will take strength from the support they find among the people." [Words of a Rebel, p. 75]

Bakunin considered it essential that revolutionaries organise and influence the masses. As he put it, "the chief aim and purpose of this organisation" of revolutionaries is to "help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality." [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 191]

Therefore, to claim that anarchists deny the need for political organisation and "leaders" is a misrepresentation. As we argue in more depth in [section J.3](#), this is not the case. However, we must stress that anarchists do not seek positions of power ("leadership") in organisations. Rather, they aim to influence by the power of our ideas, *"through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power."* [Bakunin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 193] This is because "leadership" positions in hierarchical organisations are a source of corruption, which is the second major fallacy in Grant's argument.

While acknowledging that the existing leadership of working class organisations and unions are *"bureaucratic and class collaborationist,"* Grant does not indicate why this is so. He argued that we need a "new" leadership, with the correct ideas, to replace the current ones. However, the *"policy of class collaboration"* within these leaderships did not develop by chance. Rather they are a product of both the tactics (such as electioneering, in the case of political parties) and structures used in these organisations.

Looking at structures, we can clearly see that hierarchy is key. By having leadership positions separate from the mass of workers (i.e. having hierarchical structures), an inevitable division develops between the leaders and the rank and file. The "leaders" are insulated from the life, interests and needs of the membership. Their views adjust to their position, not vice versa, and so "leadership" becomes institutionalised and quickly becomes bureaucratic.

As Bakunin argued, the only way to avoid bureaucracy is to empower the rank and file. Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, he noted that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision-making to their committees . . . In this manner 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."* To combat this bureaucracy, *"the construction workers . . . sections 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".* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 246 and p. 247]

This did not mean the end of organisations and committees, but rather a change in power. 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, **Op. Cit.**, p. 247] Power would be in the hands of the rank and file, not the committees.

It is in this context that anarchists try and give a lead. 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 assemblies of the organisation, which would retain the power to decide their own fates: *"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."* [Bakunin, [**Op. Cit.**, p. 154, p. 387 and p. 415]

Only in this way can the bad effects of having institutionalised "leadership" positions be avoided. Instead of ignoring "bad" leadership, anarchists encourage workers to rely on their

own initiative and power. They do not "refuse" to combat bureaucratic leaderships, rather they combat them from below by ensuring that workers manage their own affairs directly. As such, anarchists are well aware of the need *"to pose an alternative in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency."*

As Malatesta argued, we *"do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves**."* Thus anarchists *"advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time functionaries."* However, *"[w]e must not wait to achieve anarchy, in the meantime limiting ourselves to simple propaganda . . . We must seek to get all people . . . to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them: and in always propagating all aspects of our programme, and always struggling for its complete realisation, we must push people to want always more and to increase its pressures, until it has reached complete emancipation."* [Errico Malatesta: **His Life and Ideas**, p. 90, p. 125 and p. 189]

He, like all anarchists, stressed there were different kinds of "leadership":

"It is possible to direct ["lead"] through advice and example, leaving the people -- provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves -- to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one's own ideas and interests through police methods." [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 108]

Unsurprisingly, anarchists favour the first way of "leading" people and utterly reject the second.

Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject being "leaders" in the sense of arguing our ideas and combating the influence and power of bureaucratic leaderships. However, this "lead" is based on the influence of our ideas and, as such, is a non-hierarchical relationship between anarchist activists and other workers. Thus Grant's argument is a straw man.

Finally, his comment that *"whole history of the international workers' movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party"* is simply false. Every example of a "revolutionary party" has been a failure. They have never created a socialist society which, let us not forget, was their aim.

The first "revolutionary" party was Social Democracy. That quickly became reformist and, in Germany, crushed the revolution that broke out there after the end of the First World War.

The second, the Bolshevik party, was no better. It soon transformed itself from being the masses servant to being its master (see [section 4](#)). It justified its repression against the working class in terms of its "vanguard" position. When it degenerated into Stalinism, Communist Parties across the world followed it -- no matter how insane its policies became.

As discussed in [section H.5](#), this is unsurprising. The anarchists of Trotwatch summarise why such a "revolutionary" 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]

Therefore, while anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists (i.e. into political associations) they reject the need for a "revolutionary party" in the Marxist or Leninist mould. Rather than seeking power on behalf of the masses, anarchist groups work within the mass organisations of the working class and urge them to take and exercise power directly, without governments and without hierarchy. We seek to win people over to our ideas and, as such, we work with others as equals using debate and discussion to influence the class struggle (see [section J.3.6](#) for fuller details and a discussion of how this differs from the Trotskyist position).

Therefore, Grant's whole argument is flawed. Anarchists do not reject "leadership", they reject hierarchical leadership. We clearly see the need to organise politically to influence the class struggle but do so as equals, by the strength of our ideas. We do not seek to create or seize positions of "leadership" (i.e. power) but rather seek to ensure that the masses manage their own affairs and are influenced by political tendencies only in-so-far as they can be convinced of the validity of the politics and ideas of those tendencies.

11. Does the Spanish Revolution show anarchism is flawed?

As usual with Leninists, Grant brings up the question of the Spanish Revolution:

"The anarchist workers of the CNT played a heroic role in the struggle against fascism. In July 1936, they rose up and stormed the barracks armed with just sticks and knives and a few old hunting rifles, and beat the fascists. They set up soviets and established a workers' militia and workers' control in the factories. The CNT and the POUM (a centrist party led by ex-Trotskyists) were the only power in Barcelona. Soon the whole of Catalonia was in the hands of the workers. The bourgeois President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, actually invited the CNT to take power! But the anarchist leaders refused to take power, and the opportunity was lost."

Needless to say, this summary leaves much to be desired.

First, there are the factual errors. The offer to the CNT from Companys occurred on July 20th, immediately after the uprising had been defeated in Barcelona. The situation in the rest of Catalonia, never mind Spain, was unknown. This fact is essential to understanding the decisions made by the CNT. Faced with a military coup across the whole of Spain intent on introducing fascism, the outcome of which was unknown, the CNT in Barcelona was in a difficult situation. If it tried to implement libertarian communism then it would have had to fight both the fascist army and the Republican state. Faced with this possibility, the CNT leaders decided to ignore their politics and collaborate with other anti-fascists and ignore, rather than smash, the bourgeois state. Needless to say, to fail to indicate the rationale for the CNT's decision and the circumstances it was made in means to misinform the reader. This

does not mean the CNT's decision was correct, it is just to indicate the extremely difficult circumstances in which it was made.

Second, Grant lets the cat out of the bag by admitted that he sees the Spanish Revolution in terms of the anarchist *"leaders"* taking power. In this he followed Trotsky, who had argued that:

"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 1936-37**, p. 420]

Clearly, rather than the masses taking power, Trotskyism sees the party (the leaders) having the real power in society. Trotsky stressed this fact elsewhere when he argued that *"[b]ecause the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship."* [**Writings 1936-7**, p. 514] This was, as discussed in [section 4](#), part of a wider defence of the *"objective necessity"* of the *"dictatorship of a proletarian party"*.

The *"anarchist leaders"* quite rightly rejected this position, but they also rejected the anarchist one as well. Let us not forget that the anarchist position is the destruction of the state by means of federations of workers associations (see [section 3](#)). The CNT refused to do this. Which, of course, means that Grant is attacking anarchist theory in spite of the fact that the CNT **ignored** that theory.

As we have discussed this issue in depth elsewhere (namely sections [I.8.10](#), [I.8.11](#) and [section 20](#) of the appendix *"Marxists and Spanish Anarchism"*) we will leave our discussion of the Spanish Revolution to this short summary.

12. Does anarchism believe in spontaneous revolution?

Grant now inflicts upon his readers another erroneous position onto anarchism, namely the notion that anarchists believe in spontaneous revolution. He presents the case of the Albanian revolution:

"However, the most crushing answer to anarchism is the fate of the Albanian revolution. The Albanian masses, as the result of the nightmare brought about by the collapse of so-called market reform . . . rose up in a spontaneous insurrection. With no organisation, no leadership, and no conscious plan, they stormed the barracks with their bare hands. The army fraternised . . . opened the gates of the barracks and distributed arms. Revolutionary committees were established, especially in the South, and the armed militias spread the revolt from one town to the next. The forces of reaction sent by Berisha were routed by the armed people. There was nothing to stop them from entering Tirana . . . But here the importance of leadership becomes clear. Lacking a revolutionary leadership with the perspective of taking power and transforming society, the insurrectionists failed to take Tirana."

Needless to say, the argument for *"a revolutionary leadership"* with *"the perspective of taking power"* is hard to combine with his later argument that *"the Russian workers, basing themselves on their own strength and organisation, [must] take power into their own hands."*

As Grant has argued throughout this excerpt, the idea that the workers should take power themselves is utopian as a Bolshevik style leadership is required to seize power. Grant is simply using the old Bolshevik technique of confusing the party with the proletariat.

However, this is besides the point. Grant asserts that anarchists think a revolution can occur spontaneously, without the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists and argue their politics. Needless to say, anarchists do not hold such a position and never have. If we did then anarchists would not write books, pamphlets and leaflets, they would not produce papers and take part in struggles and they would not organise anarchist groups and federations. As we do all that, clearly we do not think that an anarchist society will come about without us trying to create it. As such, Grant's comments misrepresent the anarchist position.

This can be seen from Bakunin, who argued that the 1848 revolutions failed *"for a quite a simple reason: it was rich in instinct and in negative theoretical ideas . . . but it was still totally devoid of the positive and practical ideas which would have been necessary to build a new system . . . on the ruins of the bourgeois world. The workers who fought for the emancipation of the people in June were united by instinct, not ideas . . . This was the principal cause of their defeat."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 104]

Given that *"instinct as a weapon is not sufficient to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary machinations of the privileged classes,"* instinct *"left to itself, and inasmuch as it has not been transformed into consciously reflected, clearly determined thought, lends itself easily to falsification, distortion and deceit."* [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 215] The *"goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he [or she] wants, to unjam within him [or her] a steam of thought corresponding to his [or her] instinct."* This is done by *"a single path, that of emancipation through practical action,"* by *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses,"* of *"collective struggle of the workers against the bosses."* This would be complemented by a socialist organisation *"propagandis[ing] its principles."* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 102, p. 103 and p. 109] There was a need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence social movements:

"The Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the 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 on Anarchism, p. 157]

Only by arguing for anarchist ideas can anarchy come about. It will not come about by accident. Hence Malatesta's argument that anarchists *"must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement . . . [W]e must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised . . . masses to awaken the 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. . . And then, in the revolution, we must*

take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production . . . and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of . . . products . . . and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must . . . promote action by the workers' associations, the co-operatives, the voluntary groups -- to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless." [The Anarchist Revolution, pp. 109-110]

A key part of this is to argue that workers' organisations become the framework of the new world and smash the state. As Murray Bookchin argued, anarchists "*seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies*" and other organisations created by people in struggle "*to make themselves into **genuine organs of popular self-management**, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party.*" [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 140] For more discussion of this issue, see [section J.7.5](#).

Clearly, rather than being "*the most crushing answer to anarchism*", the fate of the Albanian revolution rather shows how inaccurate Grant's argument is. Anarchists do not hold the position he states we do, as we have proven. Anarchists were not surprised by the fate of the Albanian revolution as the Albanian workers were not fighting **for** an anarchist society but rather were protesting **against** the existing system: the role of anarchists in such a struggle would have been to convince those involved to smash the existing state and create a new society based on federations of workers' associations. That this was not done suggests that anarchist ideas were not the dominant ones in the revolt and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the revolution failed.