

Lone Wolf

Bulletin no. 3



AN ANARCHIST VIEW OF MARXISM

Among those of us who are working to help create free and just societies, all agree with Karl Marx in seeking to end, as quickly and completely as possible, the economic exploitation of some people by others.

It seems to us, however, that there are certain failings that return, again and again, to plague those societies that have been dominated by persons who claim to be following other teachings of Marx.

Is this merely coincidence and a fault of the master's disciples?

Or are there weaknesses in the doctrine and personality of Marx that make these failings inevitable?

In this Bulletin we are not going to attempt a scholarly interpretation of Marx or of the -ism that has spread around his work. We don't aim to offer "the last word" in analysis. What we want to do is to encourage discussion on certain aspects of Marxism that seem to be having important consequences today.

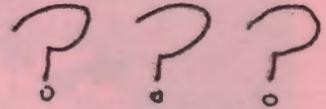
And there is urgency in the matter. Two Empires (enemies to each other and, indeed, to all life) stand in the classic macho absurdity, each armed with arsenals that, quite clearly, are capable of putting an end to life on our planet (a swift end for half of us; a long agony of death thru burns, epidemics, starvation, and radiation poisoning for the other half).

One Empire is often represented as being the democratic bastion of freedom, and the transmitter of the highest world culture, the culture that has sprung from ancient Greek genius, the gentle wisdom of Christ, etc. We see this Empire as dominated, instead, by a crass materialistic greed of almost inconceivable proportions, and resulting exploitations of peoples (the politically powerless both "at home" and "abroad") have reached such magnitude that most people in most parts of the world are striving to free themselves from the effects of United States policy and of imperialism in general.

The other Empire, in many important respects a reaction to the outrages of the first, is a brutal, reactionary totalitarianism that claims to be Marxist.

A part of the question we will address is: To what degree has the Soviet Union betrayed Marx and to what degree has Marx failed the Soviet Union? Another part is: To those peoples who strive to revolutionize their circumstances and build just societies, what is

there to learn from the teachings of Marx and from the 20th century experiences of those who have incorporated Marxist ideas into their revolutionary practices?



Michael Bakunin, an anarchist contemporary of Marx, praised Marx as "a powerful mind backed by deep learning; a man . . . whose whole life has been exclusively dedicated to the greatest cause of the present day, that of the emancipation of labour and the worker." But from as early as 1868 (when Bakunin joined Marx in forming the International) Bakunin rejected the Marxist theory that the working class should be organized into a political party that would seize political power: "We are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest, and real in the hands of the masses." Bakunin wonders how Marx "manages to overlook the fact that the establishment of a universal dictatorship . . . ruling and controlling the insurrectionary activity of the masses in all countries, as a machine might be controlled - that the establishment of such a dictatorship would in itself suffice to kill revolution and warp and paralyse all popular movements. . . . To claim that even the most intelligent and best-intentioned group of individuals will be capable of becoming the mind, soul, and guiding and unifying will of the revolutionary moment and

economic organization of the proletariat of every land is such an outrage against common sense and historical experience that one can only wonder how a man as clever as Herr Marx could have conceived it."

Quickly Bakunin had gone to the heart of the matter: "May the future preserve us from the benevolence of despotism, and may it also save us from the damaging and stultifying consequences of authoritarian, doctrinaire, or institutional socialism. Let us be socialists, but let us never become sheep. Let us seek justice, but without any sacrifice of liberty. There can be no life, no humanity, without liberty, and a form of socialism which excluded liberty, or did not accept it as a basis and as the only creative principle, would lead us straight back to slavery. . . ."

To those fighting for freedom today in Central America (and elsewhere), Bakunin's plea seems as true and as important as it was 100 years ago. He has seen where a "Central Committee" would lead. By encouraging authoritarian behavior, authority centralized in the hands of a small clique, and doctrinaire thinking, Marx sabotaged many of his own accomplishments, sowing seeds of destruction in rows parallel to those of economic liberation.

And when, in 1872, at the 5th Congress of the International, Marx tried to stifle dissent and managed to have Bakunin expelled from the International, we had an ominous foreshadowing of one of the most damaging tendencies that we see in Marxist states today: intolerance toward those who dare to disagree.

Just as Bakunin was on the scene in the 1860s & '70s to record a clear and cogent first-hand view of Marx, so Emma Goldman was in Russia to participate in the first large-scale attempt to put the theories of Marx to the test. And she is perhaps even more clear and cogent in her analysis and her response.

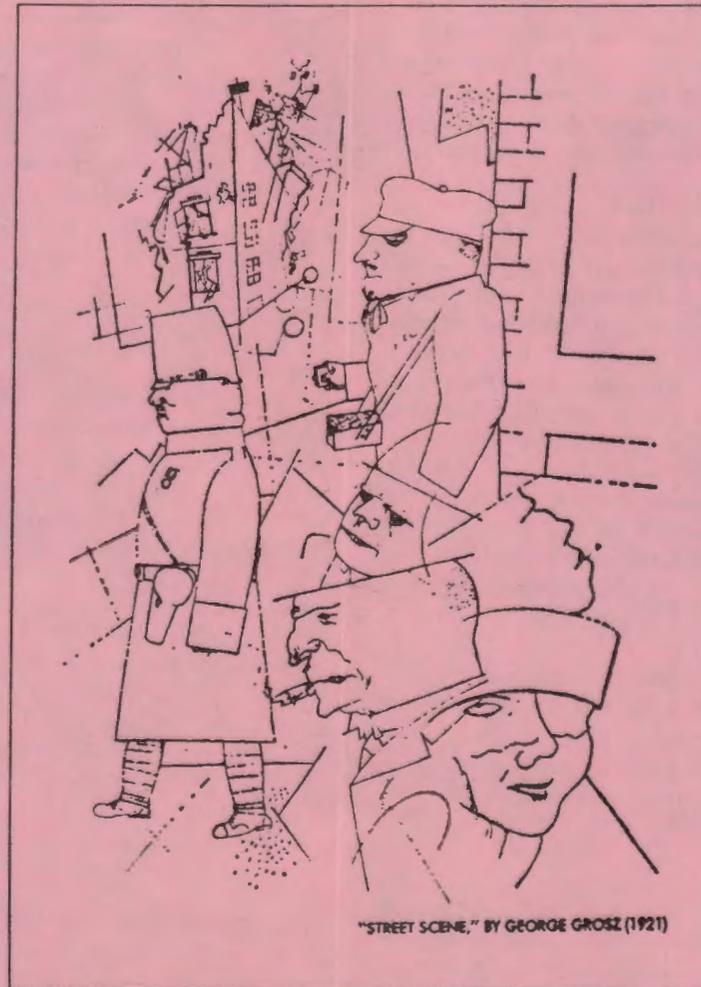
By 1922 she had already seen that the Russian Revolution had taken "a libertarian step" only to be "defeated by the Bolshevik State, by the temporary victory of the reactionary, the governmental idea" that had been nourished by Marx. She saw, as Bakunin had seen, that "the inherent tendency of the State is to concentrate, to narrow, and monopolize all social activities; the nature of revolution is, on the contrary, to grow, to broaden, and disseminate itself in ever-wider circles."

And the problem goes deeper: "It is at once the great failure and the great tragedy of the Russian Revolution that it attempted (in the leadership of the ruling political party) to change only institutions and conditions, while ignoring entirely the human and social values involved in the revolution. Worse yet . . . it systematically destroyed the already awakened conception of the new revolutionary values. The sense of justice and equity, the love of liberty and human brotherhood — these fundamentals of the real regeneration of society — the Communist State has suppressed to the point of extermination. Man's instinctive sense of equity was branded as weak sentimentality; human dignity and liberty became a bourgeois superstition; the sanctity of life, which is the very essence of social reconstruction, was condemned as unrevolutionary, almost counter-revolutionary. This fearful perversion of fundamental values bore within itself the seeds of destruction."

And, yes, let's be clear about this: it is not (as is so often argued) only with the rise of Stalin that the revolution was perverted. Emma Goldman was writing these passages in 1922, returning from two years in Russia. Marx had said: "An end that requires unjust means is not a just end." But his dependence on political manipulation, on hierarchy, and on power centralized in the hands of a few . . . this led directly to the dogmatic, manipulating, and puritanical ideas of Lenin and his Bolshevik associates. Those who fought for freedom were quickly eliminated; Engels (with the approval of Marx) had prophesied, and praised as "part of progress," the "disappearance from the surface of the globe, of not only reactionary classes and dynasties, but whole races of reactionaries." Instead it was the true revolutionaries who "disappeared" from the Soviet Union during the 1920s and '30s.

"Today is the parent of tomorrow," Emma Goldman wrote. "The present casts its shadow far into the future. That is the law of life, individual and social. Revolution that divests itself of ethical values thereby lays the foundation of injustice, deceit, and oppression for the future society. The *means* used to *prepare* the future become its *cornerstone*. Witness the tragic condition of Russia. The methods of State centralization have paralyzed individual initiative and effort; the tyranny of the dictatorship has cowed the people into slavish submission and all but extinguished the fires of liberty; organized terrorism has depraved and brutalized the masses and stifled every idealistic aspiration; institutionalized murder has cheapened human life, and all sense of the dignity of man and the value of life has been eliminated; coercion at every step has made effort bitter, labor a punishment, has turned the whole of exist-

ence into a scheme of mutual deceit, and has revived the lowest and most brutal instincts of man. A sorry heritage to begin a new life of freedom and brotherhood." Sorry in 1922 and sorry today.



"STREET SCENE," BY GEORGE GROSZ (1921)

She had understood that the Russian people were victims of a "naive faith in the miraculous power of the party that talked the loudest and made the most promises." But, in practice, the Revolution had "demonstrated beyond doubt that the State idea, State Socialism, in all its manifestations (economic, political, social, educational) is entirely and hopelessly bankrupt. Never before in history has authority, government, the State, proved so inherently static, reactionary, and even counter-revolutionary in effect."

With awareness that much theory had gone awry, most Marxists turned back to another of their master's teachings (one that is equally disturbing): the Messianic vision, i.e.: the rationalization that certain aspects of justice and freedom could be postponed (and certain crimes, such as State executions, condoned) until that day in the future when all would be set right. Of the overall plan of Marx, "the aims, the prophecies are generous and universal," Albert Camus points out, "but the doctrine is restrictive, and the reduction of every value to historical terms leads to the direst consequences. Marx thought that the ends of history, at least, would prove to be moral and rational. That was his Utopia. But Utopia, at least in the form he knew it, is destined to serve cynicism, of which he wanted no part. . . . Historical Christianity postpones to a point beyond the span of history the cure of evil and murder, which are nevertheless experienced within the span of history. Contemporary materialism also believes that it can answer all questions. But, as a slave to history, it increases the domain of historic murder and at the same time leaves it without any justification, except in the future — which again demands faith. In both cases one must wait, and meanwhile the innocent continue to die."

It is the living, present moment that is of interest to Emma Goldman: "All must learn the value of mutual aid and libertarian cooperation. Yet each must be able to remain independent in his own sphere and in harmony with the best he can yield to society. Only in that way will productive labor and educational and cultural endeavor express themselves in ever newer and richer forms."

Is there any Marxist society that has yet committed itself to protecting the individual's independence and creativity? The Gulags of the Soviet Union and the totalitarianism of Maoist China came to exist because Marxist theory allows the human race to be viewed as an abstract, and people as merely members of a class.

By 1950 Camus had seen the full magnitude of the tragedy that Marx had, in spite of his best intentions, brought to pass: "Revolutionary thought lost, in itself, a counterpoise of which it cannot, without decaying, deprive itself. This counterpoise, this spirit which takes the measure of life, is the same that animates the long tradition that can be called solitary thought, in which, since the Greeks, nature has always been weighed against evolution. The history of the First International, when German socialism ceaselessly fought against the libertarian thought of the French, the Spanish, and the Italians, is the history of the struggle of German ideology against the Mediterranean mind. The commune against the State, concrete society against absolutist society, deliberate freedom against rational tyranny, finally altruistic individualism against the colonization of the masses . . ." And now, "authoritarian thought, by means of three wars and thanks to the destruction of a revolutionary elite, has succeeded in submerging this libertarian tradition."

Camus looked at the Commisars and asked, "Why do these petty-minded Europeans who show us an avaricious face, if they no longer have the strength to smile, claim their desperate convulsions are examples of superiority?"

Perhaps every philosopher from Plato to Marx has attempted to establish a social system that reconciles justice and community; Marx chose economic community and abandoned justice. Camus now saw clearly (as Bakunin had seen in 1872 and Goldman in 1922) that it was the tragedy of Marx that he had stopped short of the protection and nourishment of human values.

And Camus tried to share a deeper, more profound vision: "Moderation, born of rebellion, can only live by rebellion. It is a perpetual conflict, continually created and mastered by the intelligence. It does not triumph either in the impossible or in the abyss. It finds its equilibrium through them. Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others."

Camus called in 1950 (in a world wrecked by war), and we call with increasing urgency today, for rebellion which "unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment's delay refuses injustice. Its merit lies in making no calculations, distributing everything it possesses to life and to living men. It is thus that it is prodigal in its gifts to men to come. Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present."

So . . . what about China?

How did this centralizing, authoritarian, Messianic legacy from Marx affect Chinese attempts to cope with the enormous sufferings of the 1940s and '50s?

Have "equity," "human dignity and liberty," and the "sanctity of life" been prime considerations of China's Marxist elite?

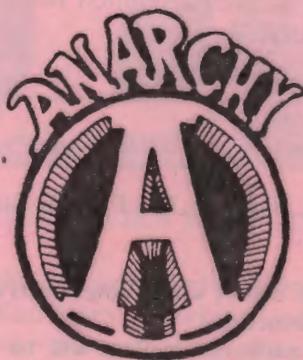
Led by Mao to expect that they would have an opportunity to make their own creative decisions about how to use their land, was there ever the possibility that the peasantry would be anything but betrayed?

And Latin America?

Are the Cuban people learning to take what is best from Marx and yet still pay close attention to human values?

In Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras . . . by what means can people overcome the vicious U.S. manipulations and simultaneously conduct a revolution that will lead to freedom and justice?

History does not allow us a pause to regroup. A new phase of world revolution is already unfolding, and (leaving you with more questions than answers) we offer this view of Marx with hopes of contributing toward the evolution of societies that will be healthier for all concerned.



The Lone Wolf Collective strives to . . .

Help in building a conscious
revolutionary anarchist movement
and

Do outreach, spreading general
information about the practicality
of anarchism.

The magnitude of present human suffering around the world, the dangers inherent in the nuclear arms race, the intolerable daily oppression of some people by others . . . these facts make immediate direct action for liberation imperative.

And, as we struggle to free ourselves today, we are called upon to be conscious of the new society that we are creating, so that we will not merely replace old totalitarianisms with new ones.

Racism, sexism, militarism, classism, nationalism, and capitalism . . . we have much to overcome and we must act immediately.

To receive our past or future leaflets write:

LONE WOLF, Box 840, Ben Franklin Station, Washington,
D.C. 20044.

A couple of dollars would cover costs of a year's mailings and help in production.

Copies of particular leaflets will be available at \$1 a dozen, \$5 a hundred.

But, most of all, it is your ideas and your support in our common struggle we seek.

Lone Wolf Collective - March 1982
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Dedicated to the memory of Richie Stock (1957-1981).