Freedom magazine
Marxism, Freedom and the State — A Review

Retrieved on 28th October 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Freedom*, a South African anarchist magazine that was one of the groups that formed the Workers Soldarity Federation.

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> "The Emancipation of the toilers can be the work only of the toilers themselves."
> Declaration of the International Working Mens Association.

Marx and Bakunin were both members of "The International", but how far apart do they stand?

This declaration is a central claim which Anarchists make, and a major difference separating us from the Marxists. Bakunin argued that the Marxist idea of a leadership of the proletariat, through a vanguard is counter-revolutionary. The basis of this idea is the Marxist notion that the workers and poor can never free themselves, or create revolution by themselves. Marxists believe that the workers are necessary for revolution, but need a vanguard to force them to do what they believed was right and wrong. This theoretical debate became clear in practice in Russia, when any unauthorised action by the workers was violently put down by the revolutionary vanguard, the Bolsheviks. The best example of this was at

Kronstad where sailors revolted against the Bolsheviks, demanding freedom and directly democratic practices, through free and open elections to the Soviets (worker councils in Russia). The response by one of the Bolshevik 'leaders' of the workers, Trotsky, was "we will shoot you down like partridges". And they did.

By placing themselves in a position firmly on the side of the workers, Bakunin and anarchists following him, have made it clear that they refuse to lead anybody. To create a free society, no revolutionary movement can suppress anybody's free will unless it infringes on others, nor can they claim an authority to decide what is correct. Anarchist decisions are reached through a complete discussion by all those the decision will effect with the aim of reaching a consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, then a decision will be reached through directly democratic procedures. It is then still up to the individual to respect the decision of the group or not, and s/he is free to leave at any point. This concept is commonly known as the 'leadership of ideas'.

As Bakunin pointed out, Marx's ideas about the state and the inability of workers to organise for themselves comes from his conception of workers. Marx was clearly an intellectual, a member of the bourgeoisie, who saw working people as 'riffraff', who all think and act the same. (His term is "lumpenproletariat"). The mere fact that his theory doesn't give workers the credit of being able to lead themselves or create revolution means that he placed himself apart from the workers, as one who is above the workers and the only type who is really capable of understanding revolution or the "real" needs of the Working Class. The argument that workers (both in the factories and the fields) cannot lead themselves or cannot be active agents and thinkers in revolution was proved wrong in Spain, during the social, political and economic revolution of 1936–1939. Workers organised efficiently running collective farms, placed the urban workplaces under self-management,

and formed militias to fight the fascists. They did this without needing the "leadership" of middle class intellectuals.

A further problem with Marx's theory, identified by Bakunin, was the contradiction between his national and internationalist beliefs. On the one hand, as a socialist, Marx believed that revolution had to be international, crossing the artificial boundaries created by governments and the ruling class to keep a check on people, and to ultimately ensure control. But, by the same token, Marx believed in the capturing and controlling of the State as the means of managing the revolution, to guide the revolution along its 'proper' course. The problem is that the function of the State is to control and to defend privilege, and to provide the 'scientific truth'. While the state exists, the economic and political freedom for which real socialism strives for is lost. Marx's idea of the State extends even further than this, however, according to Bakunin. Marx believes in a universal State as a necessary tool to emancipate the workers, and this state will be a German State, the great "Pan-Germanic State", which will be strengthened and extended to cover all the world's people. The implications of this is that Marx's writing can be used as a tool to create national consciousness, around a socialist ideal, which is necessarily internationalist. Whether this is exactly what Marx intended is not clear, but his reliance on the national state, as a tool to create revolution, certainly does not exclude it.

Despite these fundamental disagreements, Bakunin agreed with Marx's analysis of the operation of economics within capitalism, and the necessity for revolution. But he could not agree with Marx's authoritarianism, embodied in both Marx's means and ends, as the above analysis of the means of revolution and the revolutionary society shows. Perhaps Marx's failure to provide true revolutionary ideals lie in the fact that his ideas strive largely for economic, not social and political freedom. And be-

cause equality is nothing without liberty, the liberation of the Working Class will never become a reality under Marxism.

The pamphlet Marxism, Freedom and the State by Mikhail Bakunin is highly recommended reading.

> Every Command is a slap in the face of Liberty!
>
> Bakunin