

**If you want to
create Socialism
- it must
be based on
Freedom**



ZABALAZA BOOKS

Post: Postnet Suite 47, Private Bag X1,
Fordsburg, South Africa, 2033

E-Mail: zababooks@zabalaza.net

Website: www.zabalaza.net



by James O'Brien

The terms socialism and communism are often associated with the murderous dictatorships set up by the Bolsheviks in Russia and later copied by their followers all over the world. Although these State socialists talked of creating a free and equal communist society, their authoritarian methods ensured that they ended up creating the opposite, a totalitarian nightmare. Anarchists also seek to create communism. But for us freedom plays a central role, not only in the future society, but also in how we try to get there. That is why, when we talk of communism, we talk of libertarian communism.

Simply put, libertarian communism is where everybody has an equal say in making decisions that affect them and where everybody is assured of equal access to the benefits of society. It's summed up in the old phrase "from each according to ability, to each according to need."

★ Liberty without Socialism?

The shortcomings of liberty when one does not have the material ability to participate in that liberty are obvious. What's the use of being nominally free if you can't afford the healthcare to stay alive and enjoy it? Socialism would ensure that everyone was free, not just the wealthy.

★ Socialism without Liberty?

Bakunin said, "Socialism without liberty would be brutality and slavery." He was referring to the prospect of centralised state socialism, specifically Marxism, which he foresaw would result in a totalitarian society, one of the social sciences' more impressive predictions. A society that doesn't allow the free development of individuals is not worth fighting for.



This page is from *Red & Black Revolution*,
the theoretical magazine of the Irish
Workers Solidarity Movement

www.wsm.ie

★ Anarchist Socialism

Anarchists think that we should move to create socialism as soon as the workers have taken over production. There isn't any reason to keep the wage system after a revolution. As every product is a social product - nobody produces anything in isolation any more - the products themselves ought to be socialised. It's simply not possible to ascertain the true social value of anyone's labour, and in truth not worth the effort of finding out. Everybody's contribution matters. It wouldn't matter how many surgeons we had, if we didn't have cleaners ensuring a hygienic workplace. Both contribute to society. Why discriminate in favour of one in the future society? It'll only preserve the class nature of society.

We should move immediately to a system of "to each according to need". Probably this will involve rationing, but that's basically what money does anyway, just in an unfair way. But all of this has to be a voluntary act of the working class. The working class must implement libertarian socialism ourselves. If an attempt is made to impose socialism from above by a state or a benevolent few, it'll prove just as disastrous as it did in the Soviet Union. And socialism won't result anyway.

★ Power Versus Direct Action

If we create a society where a few have power over the rest, then the hunger for power, which is a definite tendency in human nature, is going to find an environment in which it can flourish. It doesn't matter whether the elite few are the rich or whether they're the leaders of the party. This is why anarchists place such emphasis on direct action. It is the libertarian principle in action. Direct action isn't some fancy stunt designed to gain publicity, as some activists seem to think as they lock themselves onto some gates for half an hour. It is about acting directly, without appealing to intermediaries to act on your behalf. It is the basis for true democracy, for direct democracy, Every time you participate directly in taking a decision on issues you are acting directly (discussion and deciding are forms of political action).

When we act for ourselves we learn useful lessons for the future as well as influencing the present. If socialism is to be achieved, people will need to have confidence in their own ability to run society. When we organise

★ Party Rule?

Is it possible to have a dual structure of workers councils and a State structure operating simultaneously? It's unlikely. Dual-power situations are inherently unstable. The State is particularly unwilling to accommodate a challenge to its authority. Rulers tend not to step aside voluntarily and we'd be doubtful that a revolutionary socialist party is going to make history in this regard.

The presence of a party assuming control of a revolutionary situation must come at the expense of the activity of the class as a whole. Either the class is in charge or the State is. This is most starkly illustrated when the grassroots organs of the class (workers' committees, community councils) come into conflict with the State. What real power do the councils have if they can be over-ruled by the State? What's the point of a State if the workers' councils can over-rule it? The logical outcome of a party seizing the initiative in a revolution is that the role of the class becomes redundant. Why be active if the party can accomplish it for you? Why be active if the party might arrest you for going against its policy?

Anarchists think that the creative capacities of the working class as a whole far outweigh the capacities of a few individual leaders. It is our view that a truly democratic society would be more efficient than it currently is, simply because it would harness everybody's ability. Planning the economy and society generally would be far more efficient than it is now because it would include the views of everybody. It would also be far more efficient than centralised State planning, which tends to become messed up in useless, self-perpetuating bureaucracy.

One reason that I personally am an anarchist is that I don't feel confident that I know what's good for everybody. For example I'd be clueless about the health sector. What's more I'd much rather leave it to the people working there, to organise themselves in conjunction with the local communities, than for it to be run by any small group.

The revolution will not be made by anarchists. The task is too complex to be accomplished by a minority. We will of course participate, advocating a libertarian direction. A free socialist society needs the active participation of millions of people. And crucially that participation can only happen voluntarily. Socialism cannot be imposed on the people. It has to be a voluntary, organic process. It has to be a libertarian process.

It's true that the Russians faced a terrible time after 1918; with the civil war and the toil it took on the urban working class. But there is also the vital element of the Bolshevik party taking power for itself and ruling over the population. Anarchists claim that this was a crucial element in the failure of the revolution. In fact I consider it counter-revolutionary. The revolution consists of the establishment of factory committees, popular soviets, etc. The smashing of State power in October was essential. The repair work that the Bolsheviks did on the State after October was counter to the revolution, however much they honestly believed otherwise. For example they rapidly moved to counter the growing power of the grassroots factory committees by insisting on State control of industry.

Given that it's the Marxist-Leninist goal to take control of the bureaucratic structure that is the State, it's logical that present day Marxists should use State structures to further their aims: Lenin said that the working class ought to be prepared for revolution by Marxists utilising the present State. Anarchists are opposed to the State and all that the principle of authority demands. Therefore we can't utilise State institutions, such as parliamentary elections to achieve our ends. As the conduct of some anarchists during the Spanish Civil war illustrates, anarchists are no more immune to the virus of power that using State positions involves than anybody else. We advocate instead building alternative movements which will pre-figure the type of society we want.

We are not in favour of merely disbanding the State. We favour its replacement with directly-democratic institutions. The State has taken on some socially necessary work such as the provision of health care. We obviously aren't in favour of shutting down hospitals because we dislike the Minister for Health and senior civil servants. Just as we would disband private companies but not do away with production, we would disband the State structure but keep the services. We advocate that workers manage the health service in consultation with the community. To repeat, necessary functions which are currently run by the State will be run by democratic workers' councils which will federate with each other not only because of a sense of mutual aid but also out of self-interest. These workers' councils differ from a State because they won't be under the control of a minority.

something useful in the present we are training ourselves for the future. Anarchism is about personal liberty. In order to act as a free person you must make decisions and act for yourself. When you are acting directly you are clearly not obeying the commands of a leader. No doubt you will be influenced by some people's arguments more than by others. But you are free to decide your own course of action. Nobody is compelling you to do anything.

Under a governmental system, whether that be a representative democracy or a dictatorship, the leaders have the authority to tell you what to do. If you don't do it then you can expect retribution. You are no longer capable of acting directly when there is a higher power controlling your activity.

★ Collective Action

Direct action does not preclude collective action. In fact the opposite is the case. Anarchists emphasise the need for collective action. This isn't simply because it's more effective, which is obviously true, but also because we are social beings whose freedom is not denied by associating with our friends and colleagues, but rather enhanced when it is a voluntary act.

It is when we are forced to associate that our freedom is denied. There is a liberal myth, or rather a statist creation myth, that originally humans lived as isolated individuals at war with each other (hence the necessity for an entity above society to control it: the State). In fact we are an intensely social species who become aware of ourselves as individuals by interacting with our fellow human beings.

From the recognition of humans as social beings flows the anarchist view on organisation. Organisation is essential. Pretty much all human endeavour relies on organisation to some extent, and anarchists are usually found to be acting through organisations of some sort whether that be informal groupings that organise a Reclaim the Streets or a more formal structure like Trade Unions or community campaigns. An anarchist society will be highly organised, but it won't be hierarchical. We envisage that autonomous cities and industries will federate together and co-ordinate their activities. With socialism there won't be any competitive reason not to. With voluntary co-operation there won't be any need for a centralised authority.

The question is not really one of organisation or not, but rather what type of organisation: libertarian or authoritarian. By authoritarian I mean the ability to enforce your will on another. Decisions are made by a few which must be carried out by the rest. So private companies and police forces are authoritarian. States are authoritarian to the core.

By libertarian I mean direct involvement in the decision-making process and actions that affect you. The right to federate is balanced with the right to disassociate. I think that only libertarianism, which is permeated by a socialist mentality, is viable, for the spirit of co-operation and mutual aid is vital.

Anarchism is a realistic political ideology. We do realise that most people have little interest in making a libertarian revolution next week. Or that making one in the next few decades will be easy. Far from it, anarchy being the most radical goal is going to encounter the greatest resistance from the ruling class. Many are daunted by the task and look for shortcuts, whether through the parliamentary route or via a revolutionary coup d'état.

But if we are serious about achieving anarchism, then we have to start about it now. It isn't going to drop from the sky. The longer we wait to begin acting for ourselves the longer it's going to be till we achieve our aim. Also many people are used to letting others run society for them. Sure they might get indignant over corruption or a particularly blatant invasion of a third world country, but it's fair to say that their actual involvement in changing anything is pretty low.

Although State socialist parties do talk about the need for direct action, it appears to be another weapon in their armoury rather than directly related to the end goal of libertarian communism. The whole point of having a minority of brainy and benevolent leaders is that they will do the difficult work for you. As such it follows that you yourself don't need to change, to participate on an equal footing with everybody else, to think about why we need socialism, you don't need to get deeply involved in making it happen. This will be fatal for any revolution because the new society will face tough times. But if people have a good understanding of what they are fighting for and have made a deep personal commitment to achieving it, it's unlikely that they are going to let it go easily.

★ The State

Libertarian organising is incompatible with the State. What follows only touches on some of the fundamental characteristics of a State. Undoubtedly the State has modified itself in the last hundred years, but its core functions remain the same. A State reserves the exclusive right to wield force. By force I include the police forces, a courts system, and of course an army for when things get especially difficult. A State is always controlled by a select few. Note that the elite can be either wealthy capitalists or party leaders.

The elite operates using a system of hierarchical authority; i.e. orders are issued by the elite at the top of the hierarchy, which are followed by those lower in the chain of command. This bureaucratic chain of command is absolutely essential to any State, Bolshevik or Capitalist. The institutions of the State are centralised and they attempt to regulate the behaviour of the rest of society. This follows from the fact that the State is a vehicle for the rule of a minority. As a minority cannot hope to satisfy the wishes of all the people and the people aren't going to submit without compulsion, it creates a huge bureaucracy to implement the orders emanating from above and to direct and control their behaviour as much as possible. Anarchists claim that this bureaucracy becomes entrenched and a source of real power.

This is an issue of profound difference between us and Marxists. Where as we wish to destroy this system of control and replace it with directly democratic structures involving the whole population, we would see the goal of the authoritarian socialist party as the capturing of this bureaucratic power for itself. This is essentially what happened in Russia. Supposedly the bureaucratic apparatus that is the State would be used to introduce socialism. Anarchists are not only sceptical that the new rulers of the State apparatus would succeed in introducing socialism, we are positively frightened that they would introduce a totalitarian nightmare. Maybe seizing control of the bureaucracy and its armed force is not the goal of rank and file socialists but it's the likely result if you maintain or re-establish the hierarchical structures.

Leninists might think that the problem is solved when they've got rid of the people who ran the old State, but that really is of limited importance. If the hierarchical patterns remain, the system remains fundamentally unaltered. Class society remains. Only this time the ruling class will be the privileged elite of the party who controls the bureaucratic structure.