

Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet "*Socialism from Below*".

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1. Introduction

In chapter three of his pamphlet *Socialism from Below*, David McNally decides to expose (what he calls) *"The Myth Of Anarchist Libertarianism."* In reality, his account is so distorted and, indeed, dishonest that all it proves is that Marxists will go to extreme lengths to attack anarchist ideas. As Brain Morris points out, defending the Leninist tradition and ideology *"implies . . . a compulsive need to rubbish anarchism."* [*Ecology & Anarchism*, p. 128] McNally's pamphlet is a classic example of this. As we will prove, his "case" is a mish-mash of illogical assertions, lies and, when facts do appear, their use is simply a means of painting a false picture of reality.

He begins by noting that *"Anarchism is often considered to represent [a] current of radical thought that is truly democratic and libertarian. It is hailed in some quarters as the only true political philosophy [of] freedom."* Needless to say, he thinks that the *"reality is quite different."* He argues that *"[f]rom its inception anarchism has been a profoundly anti-democratic doctrine. Indeed the two most important founders of anarchism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin, developed theories that were elitist and authoritarian to the core."* We will discover the truth of this assertion later. However, we must note that McNally uses the typical Marxist approach to attacking anarchism -- namely to attack anarchists rather than anarchism as such. Indeed, he lamely notes that *"[w]hile later anarchists may have abandoned some of the excesses of their founding fathers their philosophy remains hostile to ideas of mass democracy and workers' power."* Thus, we have the acknowledgement that not all anarchists share the same ideas and that anarchist theory has developed since 1876 (the year of Bakunin's death). This is to be expected as anarchists are not Proudhonists or Bakuninists -- we do not name ourselves after one person, rather we take what is useful from libertarian writers and ignore the rubbish. In Malatesta's words, *"[w]e follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying a principle in a man."* [*Life and Ideas*, p. 199] However, this is beside the point as McNally's account of the anarchism of Proudhon and Bakunin is simply false -- indeed, so false as to make you wonder if he is simply incompetent as a scholar or seeks to present a patchwork of lies as fact and "theory."

2. Is anarchism the politics of the *"small property owner"*?

McNally does start out by acknowledging that *"anarchism developed in opposition to the growth of capitalist society. What's more, anarchist hostility to capitalism centred on defence of the liberty of the individual."* However, he then distorts this actual historical development by arguing that *"the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society. Rather, anarchism defended the freedom of the small property owner - the shopkeeper, artisan and tradesman -- against the encroachments of large-scale capitalist enterprise."*

Such a position is, to say the least, a total distortion of the facts of the situation. Proudhon, for example, addressed himself to both the peasant/artisan and the proletariat. He argued in **What is Property?** that he *"preach[ed] emancipation to the proletaires; association to the labourers."* [p. 137] Thus Proudhon addressed himself to both the peasant/artisan and the "working class" (i.e. wage slaves). This is to be expected from a **libertarian** form of socialism as, at the time of

his writing, the majority of working people **were** peasants and artisans . Indeed, this predominance of artisan/peasant workers in the French economy lasted until the turn of the century. Not to take into account the artisan/peasant would have meant the dictatorship of a minority of working people over the rest of them. Given that in chapter 4 of his pamphlet McNally states that Marxism aims for a "*democratic and collective society . . . based upon the fullest possible political democracy*" his attack on Proudhon's concern for the artisan and peasant is doubly strange. Either you support the "*fullest possible political democracy*" (and so your theory must take into account artisans and peasants) or you restrict political democracy and replace it with rule by the few.

Thus Proudhon **did** support the "*the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society.*" His ideas were aimed at both artisan/peasant and proletarian. Moreover, this position was a distinctly sensible and radical position to take:

"While Marx was correct in predicting the eventual predominance of the industrial proletariat vis-a-vis skilled workers, such predominance was neither obvious nor a foregone conclusion in France during the nineteenth century. The absolute number of small industries even increased during most of the century. . .

Nor does Marx seem to have been correct concerning the revolutionary nature of the industrial proletariat. It has become a cliché of French labour history that during the nineteenth century artisans were much oftener radical than industrial workers. Some of the most militant action of workers in late nineteenth century France seems to have emerged from the co-operation of skilled, urbanised artisanal workers with less highly skilled and less urbanised industrial workers." [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, pp. 282-3]

The fruits of this union included the Paris Commune (an event both McNally and Marx praise -- see [section 12](#) for more discussion on this). In addition, as we will see, Proudhon's proposals for a mutualist society included workers self-management and collective ownership of large scale workplaces as well as artisan and peasant production. This proposal existed **explicitly** for the proletariat, for wage slaves, and **explicitly** aimed to end wage labour and replace it by association and self-management (Proudhon stated that he aimed for "*the complete emancipation of the worker . . . the abolition of the wage worker.*" [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]). Thus, rather than being backward looking and aimed at the artisan/peasant, Proudhon's ideas looked to the present (and so the future) and to both the artisan/peasant **and** proletariat (i.e. to the **whole** of the working class in France at the time).

In the words of Gustav Landauer, Proudhon's "*socialism . . . of the years 1848 to 1851 was the socialism of the French people in the years 1848 to 1851. It was the socialism that was possible and necessary at that moment. Proudhon was not a Utopian and a prophet; not a Fourier and not a Marx. He was a man of action and realisation.*" [**For Socialism**, p. 108] Vincent makes the same point, arguing that Proudhon's "*social theories may not be reduced to a socialism for only the peasant class, nor was it a socialism only for the petite bourgeois; it was a socialism of and for French workers. And in the mid-nineteenth century . . . most French workers were still artisans. . . French labour ideology largely resulted from the real social experiences and*

aspirations of skilled workers . . . Proudhon's thought was rooted in the same fundamental reality, and therefore understandably shared many of the same hopes and ideals." [Op. Cit., pp. 5-6] It is no coincidence, therefore, that when he was elected to the French Parliament in 1848 most of the votes cast for him were from "working class districts of Paris -- a fact which stands in contrast to the claims of some Marxists, who have said he was representative only of the *petite bourgeoisie*." [Robert L. Hoffman, quoted by Robert Graham, "Introduction", P-J Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xv]

Given that his proposals were aimed at the whole working class, it is unsurprising that Proudhon saw social change as coming from "below" by the collective action of the working class:

"If you possess social science, you know that the problem of association consists in organising . . . the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege . . . to conduct the war to a successful conclusion, . . . 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." [System of Economical Contradictions, pp. 397-8]

In the same work he continues his discussion of proletarian self-organisation as the means of social change:

"Thus power [i.e. the state] . . . finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat. . . The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, -- that is, in 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. Every proposition of reform which does not satisfy this condition is simply one scourge more . . . which threatens the proletariat." [Op. Cit., p. 399]

Little wonder Proudhon saw the validity of his mutualist vision from the self-activity of French workers (see [section A.1.5](#) for details). Where Proudhon differs from later anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and Goldman is that this self-activity is reformist in nature, that is seeking alternatives to capitalism which can reform it away rather than alternatives that can fight and destroy it. Thus Proudhon places his ideas firmly in the actions of working people resisting wage slavery (i.e. the proletariat, **not** the "small property owner").

Similarly with Bakunin. He argued that "revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses" and so socialism can be achieved "by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses . . . organise[d] and federate[d] spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interest, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the **ignorant masses** by some superior intellects." Such a socialist society would be based on "the collective ownership of producers' associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes."

Thus *"the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations."* And the means to this socialist society? Trade unionism (*"the complete solidarity of individuals, sections and federations in the economic struggle of the workers of all countries against their exploiters."*) [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 237, pp. 197-8, p. 197, p. 174 and p. 177] Indeed, he considered trade unions (organised from the bottom up, of course) as *"the natural organisation of the masses"* and thought that *"workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses . . . [by] trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds"* was the means by which workers could emancipate itself *"through practical action."* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 139 and p. 103]

And McNally asserts that *"the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society"*! Only someone ignorant of anarchist theory or with a desire to deceive could make such an assertion.

Needless to say, McNally's claim that anarchism is the politics of the *"small property owner"* would be even harder to justify if he mentioned Kropotkin's **communist** anarchism. However, like Proudhon's and Bakunin's support for collective ownership by workers associations it goes unmentioned -- for obvious reasons.

3. Does anarchism *"glorify values from the past"*?

McNally continues. He asserts, regardless of the facts, that anarchism *"represented the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism. For that reason, it glorified values from the past: individual property, the patriarchal family, racism."*

Firstly, we should note that unlike Marx, anarchists did not think that capitalism was inevitable or an essential phase society had to go through before we could reach a free society. They did not share Marx's viewpoint that socialism (and the struggle for socialism) had to be postponed until capitalism had developed sufficiently so that the *"centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation [sic!] of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument."* [Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 929] As McNally states, socialism was once the *"banner under which millions of working people resisted the horrors of the factory system and demanded a new society of equality, justice, freedom and prosperity."* Unfortunately, the Marxist tradition viewed such horrors as essential, unavoidable and inevitable and any form of working class struggle -- such as the Luddites -- which resisted the development of capitalism was denounced. So much for Marxism being in favour of working class *"self-emancipation"* -- if working class resistance to oppression and exploitation which does not fit into its scheme for *"working class self-emancipation"* then it is the product of ignorance or non-working class influences.

Thus, rather than representing *"the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism"* anarchism is rather the cry of the oppressed against capitalism and the desire to create a free society in the here and now and not some time in the future. To quote Landauer again:

"Karl Marx and his successors thought they could make no worse accusation against the greatest of all socialists, Proudhon, than to call him a petit-bourgeois and petit-peasant socialist, which was neither incorrect nor insulting, since Proudhon showed splendidly to the people of his nation and his time, predominately small farmers and craftsmen, how they could achieve socialism immediately without waiting for the tidy process of big capitalism." [Op. Cit., p. 61]

Thus McNally confuses a desire to achieve socialism with backward looking opposition to capitalism. As we will see, Proudhon looked at the current state of society, not backwards, as McNally suggests, and his theory reflected both artisan/peasant interests and those of wage slaves -- as would be expected from a socialist aiming to transform his society to a free one. The disastrous results of Bolshevik rule in Russia should indicate the dangers of ignoring the vast bulk of a nation (i.e. the peasants) when trying to create a revolutionary change in society.

Secondly, it is not really true that Proudhon or Bakunin "glorified" "individual property" as such. Proudhon argued that *"property is theft"* and that *"property is despotism."* He was well aware of the negative side effects of individual property. Rather he wanted to abolish property and replace it with possession. We doubt that McNally wants to socialise **all** "property" (including individual possessions and such like). We are sure that he, like Marx and Engels, wants to retain individual possessions in a socialist society. Thus they state that the *"distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property"* and that *"Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."* [The Manifesto of the Communist Party, p.47 and p. 49] Later Marx argued that the Paris Commune *"wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital . . . into mere instruments of free and associated labour."* [Selected Writings, pp. 290-1]

Thus support for *"individual property"* is not confined to Proudhon (and we must note that Proudhon desired to turn capital over to associated labour as well -- see [section A.5.1](#) for Proudhon's influence in the economic measures made during the Commune to create co-operatives).

Indeed, initially Marx had nothing but praise for Proudhon's critique of Property contained in his classic work **What is Property?**:

"Not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians he is himself a proletarian, an ouvrier. His work is a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat."
[quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Marx and Anarchism**]

As Rocker argues, Marx changed his tune simply to *"conceal from everyone just what he owed to Proudhon and any means to that end was admissible."* This can be seen from the comments we quote above which clearly show a Proudhonian influence in their recognition that possession replaces property in a socialist society and that associated labour is its economic basis. However, it is still significant that Proudhon's analysis initially provoked such praise by Marx -- an analysis which McNally obviously does not understand.

It is true that Proudhon did oppose the socialisation of artisan and peasant workplaces. He considered having control over the means of production, housing, etc. by those who use it as a key means of maintaining freedom and independence. However, Proudhon also called for "*democratically organised workers' associations*" to run large-scale industry in his 1848 Election Manifesto. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62] This aspect of his ideas is continual throughout his political works and played a central role in his social theory. Thus to say that Proudhon "glorified" "individual property" distorts his position. And as the experience of workers under Lenin indicates, collective ownership by the state does not end wage labour, exploitation and oppression. Proudhon's arguments in favour of possession and against capitalist **and** state ownership were proven right by Bolshevik Russia --state ownership did lead to "*more wage slavery*." [**Ibid.**] As the forced collectivisation of the peasantry under Stalin shows, Proudhon's respect for artisan/peasant possessions was a very sensible and humane position to take. Unless McNally supports the forced collectivisation of peasants and artisans, Proudhon's solution is one of the few positions a socialist can take.

Moving on from Proudhon, we discover even less support for "individual property." Bakunin, for example, was totally in favour of collective property and opposed individual property in the means of life. As he put it, "*the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of society and by utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174] With regards to peasants and artisans Bakunin desired **voluntary** collectivisation. "*In a free community,*" he argued, "*collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200]). Thus, rather than being a defender of "individual property" Bakunin was in fact a supporter of **collective** property (as organised in workers' associations and communes) and supported peasant and artisan property only in the sense of being against forced collectivisation (which would result in "*propelling [the peasants] into the camp of reaction.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 197]).

Hence Daniel Guerin's comments:

"Proudhon and Bakunin were 'collectivists,' which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property. . . . At the Bale congress [of the First International] in 1869, Bakunin . . . all[ied] himself with the statist Marxists . . . to ensure the triumph of the principle of collective property." ["From Proudhon to Bakunin", **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p.32]

Similarly, while it is true that Proudhon **did** glorify the patriarchal family, the same cannot be said of Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin argued that "*[e]qual rights must belong to both men and women,*" that women must "*become independent and free to forge their own way of life*" and that "*[o]nly when private property and the State will have been abolished will the authoritarian juridical family disappear.*" He opposed the "*absolute domination of the man*" in marriage, urged "*the full sexual freedom of women*" and argued that the cause of women's liberation was

"indissolubly tied to the common cause of all the exploited workers -- men and women."
[**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 396-7] Hardly what would be considered as the glorification of the patriarchal family -- and a position shared by Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman, Goldman, Chomsky and Ward. Thus to state that "anarchism" glorifies the patriarchal family simply staggers belief. Only someone ignorant of both logic and anarchist theory could make such an assertion. We could make similar remarks with regards to the glorification of racism (as Robert Graham points out *"anti-semitism formed no part of Proudhon's revolutionary programme."* [Op. Cit., p. xxxvi] The same can be said of Bakunin).

4. Why are McNally's comments on Proudhon a distortion of his ideas?

McNally now attempts to provide some evidence for his remarks. He turns to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *"widely proclaimed 'the father of anarchism.'"* As he correctly notes, he was a *"printer by vocation"* and that he *"strongly opposed the emergence of capitalism in France."* However, McNally claims that Proudhon's *"opposition to capitalism was largely backward-looking in character"* as he *"did not look forward to a new society founded upon communal property which would utilise the greatest inventions of the industrial revolution. Instead, Proudhon considered small, private property the basis of his utopia. His was a doctrine designed not for the emerging working class, but for the disappearing petit bourgeoisie of craftsmen, small traders and rich peasants."* Unfortunately McNally has got his facts wrong. It is well known that this was not the case (which is why McNally used the words *"largely backward-looking"* -- he is aware of facts but instead downplays them).

If you look at Proudhon's writings, rather than what Marx and Engels **claimed** he wrote, it will soon be discovered that Proudhon in fact **favoured** collective ownership of large scale industry by workers' associations. He argued for *"the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations . . . We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62] Three years later he stressed that *"[e]very industry, operation or enterprise which by its nature requires the employment of a large number of workmen of different specialities, is destined to become a society or company of workers."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 216] This argument for workers' self-management and collective ownership follows on from his earlier comment in 1840 that *"leaders" within industry "must be chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves."* [**What is Property?**, p. 414]

Rather than base his utopia on *"small, private property"* Proudhon based it on the actual state of the French economy -- one marked by both artisan and large-scale production. The later he desired to see transformed into the collective property of workers' associations and placed under workers' self-management. The former, as it did not involve wage-labour, he supported as being non-capitalist. Thus his ideas were aimed at both the artisan and the appearing class of wage slaves. Moreover, rather than dismiss the idea of large-scale industry in favour of *"small, private property"* Proudhon argued that *"[l]arge industry . . . come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the [labour] association."* [quoted

by K. Steven Vincent, **Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 156] As Vincent correctly summarises:

"On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given on the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For example, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of . . . work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis." [Op. Cit., p. 156]

As can be seen, McNally distorts Proudhon's ideas on this question.

McNally correctly states that Proudhon *"oppose[d] trade unions."* While it is true that Proudhon opposed strikes as counter-productive as well as trade unions, this cannot be said of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, and so on. Bakunin, for example, considered trade unions as truest means of expressing the power of the working class and strikes as a sign of their *"collective strength."* [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 149-50] Why should Proudhon (the odd man out in anarchist theory with regards to this issue) be taken as defining that theory? Such an argument is simply dishonest and presents a false picture of anarchist theory.

Next McNally states that Proudhon *"violently opposed democracy"* and presents a series of non-referenced quotes to prove his case. Such a technique is useful for McNally as it allows him quote Proudhon without regard to when and where Proudhon made these comments and the context in which they were made. It is well known, for example, that Proudhon went through a reactionary phase roughly between 1852 and 1862 and so any quotes from this period would be at odds with his anarchist works. As Daniel Guerin notes:

"Many of these masters were not anarchists throughout their lives and their complete works include passages which have nothing to do with anarchism."

"To take an example: in the second part of his career Proudhon's thinking took a conservative turn." [Anarchism, p. 6]

Similarly, McNally fails to quote the many statements Proudhon made in favour of democracy. Why should the anti-democratic quotes represent anarchism and not the pro-democratic ones? Which ones are more in line with anarchist theory and practice? Surely the pro-democratic ones. Hence we find Proudhon arguing that *"[i]n democratising us, revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy"* and that his People's Bank *"embodies the financial and economic aspects of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."* We have already mentioned Proudhon's support for workers' self-management of production and his People's Bank was also democratic in nature -- *"A committee of thirty representatives shall be set up to see to the management of the Bank . . . They will be*

chosen by the General Meeting . . . [which] shall consist of not more than one thousand nominees of the general body of associates and subscribers . . . elected according to industrial categories and in proportion to the number of subscribers and representatives there are in each category." [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 63, p. 75 and p. 79] Thus, instead of bourgeois democracy Proudhon proposes industrial and communal democracy:

"In place of laws, we will put contracts [i.e. free agreement]. -- No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each town, each industrial union, makes its own laws." [The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 245-6]

"If political right is inherent in man and citizen, consequently if suffrage ought to be direct, the same right is inherent as well, so much the more so, for each corporation [i.e. self-managed industry], for each commune or city, and the suffrage in each of these groups, ought to be equally direct." [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Op. Cit., p. 219]

"In order that the association may be real, he who participates in it must do so . . . as an active factor; he must have a deliberative voice in the council . . . everything regarding him, in short, should be regulated in accordance with equality. But these conditions are precisely those of the organisation of labour." [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Op. Cit., pp. 155-6]

Do these quotes suggest a man "violently opposed [to] democracy"? Of course not. Nor does McNally quote Proudhon when he stated that "*[b]esides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians bulk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.*" He also supported freedom of association, assembly, religion, of the press and of thought and speech. [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63] Nor does McNally note Proudhon's aim of (and use of the term) "*industrial democracy*" which would be "*a reorganisation of industry, under the jurisdiction of all those who compose it.*" [quoted by Vincent, Op. Cit., p. 225] As can be seen, Proudhon's position on democracy is not quite what McNally suggests.

Thus McNally presents a distorted picture of Proudhon's ideas and thus leads the reader to conclusions about anarchism violently at odds with its real nature. It is somewhat ironic that McNally attacks Proudhon for being anti-democratic. After all, as we indicate in [section 8](#) below, the Leninist tradition in which he places himself has a distinct contempt for democracy and, in practice, destroyed it in favour of party dictatorship.

Lastly, McNally states that Proudhon "*opposed emancipation for the American blacks and backed the cause of the southern slave owners during the American Civil War.*" In fact, the American Civil War had very little to do with slavery and far more to do with conflicts within the US ruling class. Proudhon opposed the North simply because he feared the centralisation that such a victory would create. He did not "*tolerate*" slavery. As he wrote in **The Principle of Federation** "*the enslavement of part of a nation denies the federal principle itself.*" [p. 42f] Moreover, what are we to draw from Proudhon's position with regards the American Civil War about anarchism? Bakunin supported the North (a fact unmentioned by McNally). Why is Proudhon's position an example of anarchism in practice and not Bakunin's? Could it be that

rather than attack anarchism, McNally attacks anarchists?

Also, it is somewhat ironic that McNally mentions Proudhon's "support" for the South as the Leninist tradition he places his own politics is renown for supporting various dictatorships during wars. For example, during the Vietnam war the various Leninist groups called for victory to North Vietnam, a Stalinist dictatorship. During the Gulf War, they called for victory to Iraq, another dictatorship. In other words, they "tolerated" and "supported" anti-working class regimes, dictatorships and repression of democracy. They stress that they do not politically support these regimes, rather they wish these states to win in order to defeat the greater evil of imperialism. In practice, of course, such a division is hard to defend -- for a state to win a war it must repress its own working class and so, in calling for a victory for a dictatorship, they must support the repression and actions that state requires to win the war. After all, an explosion of resistance, class struggle and revolt in the "lesser imperialist power" will undermine its war machine and so lead to its defeat. Hence the notion that such calls do not mean support for the regime is false. Hence McNally's comments against Proudhon smack of hypocrisy -- his political tradition have done similar things and sided with repressive dictatorships during wars in the name of political aims and theory. In contrast, anarchists have consistently raised the idea of "*No war but the class war*" in such conflicts (see [section A.3.4](#)).

5. Why are McNally's comments on Bakunin a distortion of his ideas?

McNally then moves on to Bakunin whom he states "*shared most of Proudhon's views.*" The truth is somewhat different. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin supported trade unions and strikes, equality for women, revolution and far more extensive collectivisation of property. In fact, rather than share most of his views, Bakunin disagreed with Proudhon on many subjects. He did share Proudhon's support for industrial self-management, self-organisation in self-managed workers' associations from below, his hatred of capitalism and his vision of a decentralised, libertarian socialist society. It is true that, as McNally notes, "*Bakunin shared [Proudhon's] anti-semitism*" but he fails to mention Marx and Engels' many racist remarks against Slavs and other peoples. Also it is not true that Bakunin "*was a Great Russian chauvinist convinced that the Russians were ordained to lead humanity into anarchist utopia.*" Rather, Bakunin (being Russian) hoped Russia would have a libertarian revolution, but he also hoped the same for France, Spain, Italy and all countries in Europe (indeed, the world). Rather than being a "*Great Russian chauvinist*" Bakunin opposed the Russian Empire (he wished "*the destruction of the Empire of All the Russias*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 162]) and supported national liberation struggles of nationalities oppressed by Russia (and any other imperialist nation).

McNally moves on to Bakunin's on revolutionary organisation methods, stating that they "*were overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian.*" We have discussed this question in some detail in section J.3.7 ([Doesn't Bakunin's "Invisible Dictatorship" prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?](#)) and so will not do so here. However, we should point out that Bakunin's viewpoints on the organisational methods of mass working class organisations and those of political groupings were somewhat different.

The aim of the political grouping was to exercise a "natural influence" on the members of working class unions and associations, seeking to convince them of the validity of anarchist ideas. The political group did not aim to seize political power (unlike Marxists) and so it "rule[d] out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control." Rather the "revolution would 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 below upwards by means of revolutionary delegation." All the political group could do was to "assist the birth of the revolution by sowing ideas corresponding to the instincts of the masses . . . [and act] as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instinct." The political group thus "help[s] the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and the fullest freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination." [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 172 and p. 191]

As regards the forms of popular organisations Bakunin favoured, he was clear it would be based on "factory, artisan, and agrarian sections" and their federations [Statism and Anarchy, p. 51]. In other words, trade unions organised from the bottom up and based upon self-management in "general membership meetings . . . [i.e.] popular assemblies . . . [where] the items on the agenda were amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed." The "federative alliance of all the workers' associations . . . will constitute the commune . . . [with] deputies invested with imperative, always responsible, and always revocable mandates." [Bakunin on Anarchism p. 247 and p. 153]

Given McNally's praise of the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets, it seems strange that Bakunin's comments with regards to revolutionary social organisation with its obvious parallels to both should not be mentioned by McNally. Perhaps because to do so would totally undermine his case? Thus rather than being "overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian" Bakunin's ideas on a future society bear marked similarities to the actual structures created by working people in struggle and are marked by libertarian and self-managed visions and concepts -- as anyone familiar with Bakunin's work would know.

McNally then quotes "one historian" on Bakunin (not even providing a name makes evaluating the accuracy of the historian's work impossible and so leaves the reader in the dark as to whether the historian does provide a valid account of Bakunin's ideas). The unnamed author states that:

"The International Brotherhood he founded in Naples in 1865-66 was as conspiratorial and dictatorial as he could make it, for Bakunin's libertarianism stopped short of the notion of permitting anyone to contradict him. The Brotherhood was conceived on the Masonic model, with elaborate rituals, a hierarchy, and a self-appointed directory consisting of Bakunin and a few associates."

However, as we argue in [section J.3.7](#), this description of Bakunin's secret societies is so distorted as to be useless. To point to just **two** examples, the historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates that after the Alliance was founded "Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Worker's Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin's secrecy. Bakunin's view prevailed on the first question as he

succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents. . . ." [**Bakunin and the Italians**, p. 83] Moreover, the Spanish section of the Alliance "survived Bakunin . . . yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way as it had done during Bakunin's lifetime." [George R. Esenwein, **Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain**, p. 43] Hardly what you would expect if McNally's vision was accurate.

In summary, McNally's comments are a distortion of Bakunin's ideas and activities. McNally represents a distorted picture of one aspect of Bakunin's ideas while ignoring those aspects which support working class self-organisation and self-management.

6. Are the "quirks of personality" of Proudhon and Bakunin listed by McNally actually rooted "in the very nature of anarchist doctrine"?

After chronicling the failings and distorting the facts of two individuals, McNally tries to generalise. "*These characteristics of Bakunin and Proudhon,*" he argues, "*were not mere quirks of personality. Their elitism, authoritarianism and support for backward-looking and narrow-minded causes are rooted in the very nature of anarchist doctrine.*" Thus McNally claims that these failings of Proudhon and Bakunin are not personal failings but rather political. They represent the reactionary core of anarchist politics. However, his position leaves something to be desired. For example, the question remains, however, why, say, Proudhon's support of the South during the American Civil War is an example of "*anarchist doctrine*" while Bakunin's support of the North is not. Or why Proudhon's opposition to trade unions and strikes is an example of "*anarchist doctrine*" while Bakunin's (and Kropotkin's, Malatesta's, Berkman's, Goldman's, etc) support for strikes and union organisation is not. Or why Proudhon's sexism is another example but Bakunin's, Kropotkin's, Goldman's, Malatesta's, et al support for women's equality is not. Indeed, rather than take examples which are common to anarchist theorists McNally takes only those positions held by one, at most two, major anarchist thinkers (positions tangential to the core of their ideas and, indeed, directly opposed to them). From this minority of examples he generalises a theory -- and so violates the basic principles of the scientific method!

These examples in themselves prove the weakness of McNally's claims and the low levels of scholarship which lay behind them. Indeed, it is amazing that the SWP/ISO printed this diatribe - it obviously shows their contempt for facts, history and the intelligence of their desired audience.

7. Are anarchists against democracy?

McNally goes onto assert the following:

"Originating in the revolt of small property owners against the centralising and collectivising trends in capitalist development (the tendency to concentrate production in fewer and fewer large workplaces), anarchism has always been rooted in a hostility to democratic and collectivist practices. The early anarchists feared the organised power of

the modern working class."

We have already refuted the claim that the *"early anarchists feared the organised power of the modern working class."* We will now indicate why McNally is wrong to claim that anarchists express *"hostility to democratic and collectivist practices."*

As indicated above Proudhon supported collective ownership and management of large-scale workplaces (i.e. those which employ wage-slaves under capitalism). Thus he clearly was in favour of economic direct democracy and collective decision making by groups of workers. Similarly, Bakunin also supported workers' productive associations like co-operatives and envisioned a free society as being based on workers' collective ownership and the self-management of production by the workers themselves. In addition, he supported trade unions and saw the future society as being based on federations of workers' associations. To claim that anarchists are hostile to democratic and collectivist practices is simply not true. As would be clear to anyone reading their works.

McNally then asserts that *"[t]o this day, most anarchists defend the 'liberty' of the private individual against the democratically made decisions of collective groups."* Here McNally takes a grain of truth to create a lie. Yes, anarchists **do** defend the liberty of individuals to rebel against the decisions of collective groups (we should point out that Marxists usually use such expressions as a euphemism for the state, but here we will take it at face value). Why? For two reasons. Firstly, the majority is not always right. Secondly, simply because progress is guaranteed by individual liberty -- by **dissent**. That is what McNally is attacking here -- the right of individuals and groups to dissent, to express themselves and live their own lives.

As we argue in [section A.2.11](#), most anarchists are in favour of direct democracy in free associations. However, we agree with Carole Pateman when she argues:

"The essence of liberal social contract theory is that individuals ought to promise to, or enter an agreement to, obey representatives, to whom they have alienated their right to make political decisions . . . Promising . . . is an expression of individual freedom and equality, yet commits individuals for the future. Promising also implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation, and of evaluating and changing their own actions and relationships; promises may sometimes justifiably be broken. However, to promise to obey is to deny or limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals' freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities. To promise to obey is to state that, in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate." [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 19]

Thus, for anarchists, a democracy which does not involve individual rights to dissent, to disagree and to practice civil disobedience would violate freedom and equality, the very values McNally claims to be at the heart of Marxism. He is essentially arguing that the minority becomes the slave of the majority -- with no right of dissent when the majority is wrong. In effect, he wishes the minority to be subordinate, not equal, to the majority. Anarchists, in contrast, because they support self-management also recognise the importance of dissent and individuality -- in essence, because they are in favour of self-management ("democracy" does not do the concept justice)

they also favour the individual freedom that is its rationale. We support the liberty of private individuals because we believe in self-management ("democracy") so passionately.

Simply put, Marxism (as McNally presents it here) flies in the face of how societies change and develop. New ideas start with individuals and minorities and spread by argument and by force of example. McNally is urging the end of free expression of individuality. For example, who would seriously defend a society that "democratically" decided that, say, homosexuals should not be allowed the freedom to associate freely? Or that inter-racial marriage was against "Natural Law"? Or that socialists were dangerous subversives and should be banned? He would, we hope (like all sane people), recognise the rights of individuals to rebel against the majority when the majority violate the spirit of association, the spirit of freedom and equality which should give democracy its rationale.

Indeed, McNally fails to understand the rationale for democratic decision making -- it is not based on the idea that the majority is always right but that individual freedom requires democracy to express and defend itself. By placing the collective above the individual, McNally undermines democracy and replaces it with little more than tyranny by the majority (or, more likely, those who claim to represent the majority).

If we take McNally's comments seriously then we must conclude that those members of the German (and other) Social Democratic Party who opposed their party's role in supporting the First World War were acting in inappropriately. Rather than express their opposition to the war and act to stop it, according to McNally's "logic" they should have remained in their party (after all, **leaving** the party meant ignoring the democratic decision of a collective group!), accepted the democratic decision of collective groups and supported the Imperialist slaughter in the name of democracy. Of course, McNally would reject such a position -- in **this** case the rights of minorities take precedence over the "*democratic decisions of collectives.*" This is because the majority is not always right and it is only through the dissent of individuals and minorities that the opinion of the majority can be moved towards the right one. Thus his comments are fallacious.

Progress is determined by those who dissent and rebel against the status quo and the decisions of the majority. That is why anarchists support the right of dissent in self-managed groups -- in fact, as we argue in [section A.2.11](#), dissent, refusal, revolt by individuals and minorities is a key aspect of self-management. Given that Leninists do not support self-management (rather they, at best, support the Lockean notion of electing a government as being "democracy") it is hardly surprising they, like Locke, views dissent as a danger and something to denounce. Anarchists, on the other hand, recognising that self-management's (i.e. direct democracy) rationale and base is in individual freedom, recognise and support the rights of individuals to rebel against what they consider as unjust impositions. As history shows, the anarchist position is the correct one -- without rebellion, numerous minorities would never have improved their position. Indeed, McNally's comments is just a reflection of the standard capitalist diatribe against strikers and protestors -- they don't need to protest, for they live in a "democracy."

So, yes, anarchists do support individual freedom to resist even democratically made decisions simply because democracy **has to be** based on individual liberty. Without the right of dissent,

democracy becomes a joke and little more than a numerical justification for tyranny. Thus McNally's latter claim that the "*challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom*" seems farcical -- after all, he has just admitted that Marxism aims to eliminate individual freedom in favour of "*collective groups*" (i.e. the government). Unless of course he means freedom for the abstraction "humanity" rather than concrete freedom of the individual to govern themselves as individuals and as part of freely joined self-managed associations? For those who really seek to restore to socialism its passionate concern for freedom the way it clear -- anarchism. Hence Murray Bookchin's comments:

"Marxism[']s] . . . perspectives are orientated not towards concrete, existential freedom, but towards an abstract freedom -- freedom for 'Society', for the 'Proletariat', for categories rather than for people." [**Post Scarcity Anarchism**, pp. 225-6]

Anarchism, on the other hand, favours freedom for people and that implies two things -- individual freedom and self-management (direct democracy) in free associations. Any form of "democracy" not based on individual freedom would be so contradictory as to be useless as a means to human freedom (and vice versa, any form of "individual freedom" -- such a liberalism - - which denies self-management would be little more than a justification for minority rule and a denial of human freedom).

Ultimately, McNally's attack on anarchism fails simply because the majority is not always right and dissent a key to progress. That he forgets these basic facts of life indicates the depths to which Marxists will sink to distort the truth about anarchism.

Not that those in the Bolshevik tradition have any problem with individuals ignoring the democratic decisions of collective groups. The Bolsheviks were very happy to let individuals ignore and revoke the democratic decisions of collective groups -- **as long as the individuals in question were the leaders of the Bolshevik Party**. As the examples we provide later (in [section 8](#)) indicate, leading lights in the Leninist tradition happily placed the rights of the party before the rights of working people to decide their own fate.

Thus McNally comments are strange in the extreme. Both anarchists and Leninists share a belief that individuals can and should have the right to ignore decisions made by groups. However, Leninists seem to think only the government and leadership of the Party should have that right while anarchists think **all** should. Unlike the egalitarian support for freedom and dissent for all anarchists favour, Leninists have an elitist support for the right of those in power to ignore the wishes of those they govern. Thus the history of Marxist parties in power expose McNally as a hypocrite. As we argue in [section 14](#), Marxist ideology provides the rationale for such action.

Moreover, in spite of McNally's claim that the Leninist tradition is democratic we find Lenin arguing that the "*irrefutable experience of history has shown that . . . the dictatorship of individual persons was often the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes.*" [quoted by Maurice Brintin, **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control**, p. 40] Such a comment is not an isolated one, as we indicate in [section 8](#) and indicates well the anti-democratic nature of the tradition McNally places himself in. Thus McNally's attempt to portray anarchism as "anti-democratic" is somewhat ironic.

And we must note, as well as refuting McNally's claim that Leninism is a democratic tradition, Lenin's comments display a distinct confusion over the nature of a **social** revolution (rather than a political one). Yes, **previous** revolutions may have utilised the dictatorship of individuals but these revolutions have been revolutions from one class system to another. The "revolutionary" classes in question were **minority** classes and so elite rule would not in any way undermine their class nature. Not so with a **socialist** revolution which must be based on mass participation (in every aspect of society, economic, political, social) if it is to achieve its goals -- namely a classless society. Little wonder, with such theoretical confusion, that the Russian revolution ended in Stalinism -- the means used determined the ends (see sections [13](#) and [14](#) for more discussion of this point).

McNally then states that anarchists "*oppose even the most democratic forms of collective organisation of social life. As the Canadian anarchist writer George Woodcock explains: 'Even were democracy possible, the anarchist would still not support it . . . Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics . . .'*" That is to say, anarchists reject any decision-making process in which the majority of people democratically determine the policies they will support."

First, we must point out a slight irony in McNally's claim. The irony is that Marxists usually claim that they seek a society similar to that anarchists seek. In the words of Marx:

"What all socialists understand by anarchy is this: once the aim of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, has been attained, the power of the State . . . disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 76]

So, Marxists and anarchists seek the same society, one of individual freedom. Hence McNally's comments about anarchism also apply (once the state "withers away", which it never will) to Marxism. But, of course, McNally fails to mention this aspect of Marxism and its conflict with anarchism.

However, our comments above equally apply here. Anarchists are not opposed to people in free associations democratically determining the policies they will support (see [section A.2.11](#) for more details on this). What we **do** oppose is the assumption that the majority is always right and that minorities should submit to the decisions of the majority no matter how wrong they are. We feel that history is on our side on this one -- it is only by the freedom to dissent, by the direct action of minorities to defend and extend their freedoms that society progresses. Moreover, we feel that theory is on our side -- majority rule without individual and minority rights is a violation of the principle of freedom and equality which democracy is said to be built on.

Democracy should be an expression of individual liberty but in McNally's hands it is turned into bourgeois liberalism. Little wonder Marxism has continually failed to produce a free society. It has no conception of the relationship of individual freedom to democracy and vice versa.

8. Are Leninists in favour of democracy?

McNally's attack on Proudhon (and anarchism in general) for being "anti-democratic" is

somewhat ironic. After all, the Leninist tradition he places himself in did destroy democracy in the workers' soviets and replaced it with party dictatorship. Thus his attack on anarchism can be turned back on his politics, with much more justification and evidence.

For example, in response to the "*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*" during the spring and summer of 1918 "*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections . . . [In] the city of Izhevsk [for example] . . . in the May election [to the soviet] the Mensheviks and SRs won a majority . . . In June, these two parties also won a majority of the executive committee of the soviet. At this point, the local Bolshevik leadership refused to give up power . . . [and by use of the military] abrogated the results of the May and June elections and arrested the SR and Menshevik members of the soviet and its executive committee.*" In addition, "*the government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918. Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would show gains.*" [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 23-4 and p. 22]

In the workplace, the Bolsheviks replaced workers' economic democracy with "*one-man management*" selected from above, by the state ("*The elective principle must now be replaced by the principle of selection*" -- Lenin). Trotsky did not consider this a result of the Civil War -- "*I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 63 and pp. 66-7] He pushed the ideas of "*militarisation of labour*" as well as abolishing democratic forms of organisation in the military (this later policy occurred **before** the start of the Civil War -- as Trotsky put it, the "*elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree*" [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, pp.37-8]).

In May 1921, the All-Russian Congress of the Metalworkers' Union met. The "*Central Committee of the [Communist] Party handed down to the Party faction in the union a list of recommended candidates for **union** (sic!) leadership. The metalworkers' delegates voted down the list, as did the Party faction in the union . . . The Central Committee of the Party disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. So much for 'elected and revocable delegates.' Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!*" [M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83]

These are a few examples of Trotsky's argument that you cannot place "*the workers' right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!*" He continued by stating the "*Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy.*" [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

Thus, **when in power**, Trotsky did not "*insist against all odds that socialism was rooted in the struggle for human freedom*" as McNally claims he did in the 1920s and 1930s (as we discuss in [section 15](#), Trotsky did not do it then either). Rather, he thought that the "*very principle of*

compulsory labour is for the Communist quite unquestionable . . . the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power . . . and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation." Can human freedom be compatible with the "introduction of compulsory labour service [which] is unthinkable without the application . . . of the methods of militarisation of labour"? Or when the "working class cannot be left wandering round all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers." [Op. Cit., p. 66 and p. 61]

Of course McNally tries to blame the destruction of democracy in Russia on the Civil War but, as indicated above, the undermining of democracy started **before** the civil war started and continued after it had finished. The claim that the "working class" had been destroyed by the war cannot justify the fact that attempts by working class people to express themselves were systematically undermined by the Bolshevik party. Nor does the notion of an "exhausted" or "disappeared" working class make much sense when "in the early part of 1921, a spontaneous strike movement . . . took place in the industrial centres of European Russia" and strikes involving around 43 000 per year took place between 1921 and 1925. [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 188 and p. 88] While it is undeniable that the working class was reduced in numbers because of the civil war, it cannot be said to have been totally "exhausted" and, obviously, did survive the war and was more than capable of collective action and decision making. Strikes, as Bakunin argued, "indicate a certain collective strength" and so rather than there being objective reasons for the lack of democracy under Lenin we can suggest **political** reasons -- the awareness that, given the choice, the Russian working class would have preferred someone else in power!

Also, we must point out a certain ingenuity in McNally's comments that Stalinism can be explained purely by the terrible civil war Russia experienced. After all, Lenin himself stated that every "revolution . . ., in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances" and "[r]evolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances." [Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?, p. 80 and p. 81] Thus McNally's assertion that for "the germ cell of socialism to grow [in Russia], it required several essential ingredients. One was peace. The new workers' state could not establish a thriving democracy so long as it was forced to raise an army and wage war to defend itself" is simply incredible. It also raises an important question with regards Leninist ideas. If the Bolshevik political and organisational form cannot survive during a period of disruption and complicated circumstances then it is clearly a theory to be avoided at all costs.

Therefore, in practice, Leninism has proven to be profoundly anti-democratic. As we argue in sections [13](#) and [14](#) this is due to their politics -- the creation of a "strong government and centralism" will inevitably lead to a new class system being created [Lenin, **Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 75] This is not necessarily because Leninists seek dictatorship for themselves. Rather it is because of the nature of the state machine. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

"Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of

representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of a nationalised economy, a 'workers' republic' might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin's more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression."

He continues:

"Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a 'proletariat organised as a ruling class.' If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty. . . [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish -- and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established -- well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society." [The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems]

This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not turned into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution. Moreover, as indicated in [section 14](#), their idea of the party being the "vanguard" of the working class, combined with its desire for centralised power, makes the dictatorship of the party **over** the proletariat inevitable.

9. Why is McNally wrong on the relation of syndicalism to anarchism?

After slandering anarchism, McNally turns towards another form of libertarian socialism, namely syndicalism. It is worth quoting him in full as his comments are truly ridiculous. He states that there is *"another trend which is sometimes associated with anarchism. This is syndicalism. The syndicalist outlook does believe in collective working class action to change society. Syndicalists look to trade union action -- such as general strikes -- to overthrow capitalism. Although some syndicalist viewpoints share a superficial similarity with anarchism -- particularly with its hostility to politics and political action -- syndicalism is not truly a form of anarchism. By accepting the need for mass, collective action and decision-making, syndicalism is much superior to classical anarchism."*

What is ridiculous about McNally's comments is that all serious historians who study the links between anarchism and syndicalism agree that **Bakunin** (for want of a better expression) is the

father of syndicalism (see [section J.3.8](#) -- indeed, many writers point to syndicalist aspects in Proudhon's ideas as well but here we concentrate on Bakunin)! Bakunin looked to trade union action (including the general strike) as the means of overthrowing capitalism and the state. Thus Arthur Lehning's comment that "*Bakunin's collectivist anarchism . . . ultimately formed the ideological and theoretical basis of anarcho-syndicalism*" is totally true and indicative. ["Introduction", **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 29] As is Rudolf Rocker's:

"Modern Anarcho-syndicalism is a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance." [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 49]

Little wonder, then, we discover Caroline Cahm pointing out "*the basic syndicalist ideas of Bakunin*" and that he "*argued that trade union organisation and activity in the International [Working Men's Association] were important in the building of working-class power in the struggle against capital . . . He also declared that trade union based organisation of the International would not only guide the revolution but also provide the basis for the organisation of the society of the future.*" Indeed, he "*believed that trade unions had an essential part to play in the developing of revolutionary capacities of the workers as well as building up the organisation of the masses for revolution.*" [**Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 219, p. 215 and p. 216] Cahm quotes Bakunin on the role of the general strike:

"When strikes spread by contagion, it is because they are close to becoming a general strike, and a general strike in view of the ideas of emancipation which hold sway over the proletariat, can only lead to a cataclysm which would make society start a new life after shedding its old skin." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 217]

Or George R. Esenwein's comment that syndicalism "*had deep roots in the Spanish libertarian tradition. It can be traced to Bakunin's revolutionary collectivism.*" He also notes that the class struggle was "*central to Bakunin's theory.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 209 and p. 20]

Perhaps, in the face of such evidence (and the writings of Bakunin himself), Marxists like McNally could claim that the sources we quote are either anarchists or "sympathetic" to anarchism. To counter this we will quote Marx and Engels. According to Marx Bakunin's theory consisted of urging the working class to "*only organise themselves by trades-unions*" and "*not occupy itself with politics.*" Engels asserted that in the "*Bakuninist programme a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started*" and that they admitted "*this required a well-formed organisation of the working class*" (i.e. a trade union federation). [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48, p. 132 and p. 133] Ignoring the misrepresentations of Marx and Engels about the theories of their enemies, we can state that they got the basic point of Bakunin's ideas -- the centrality of trade union organisation and struggle as well as the use of strikes and the general strike.

(As an aside, ironically enough, Engels distorted diatribe against Bakunin and the general strike was later used against more radical Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg -- usually claimed by Leninists as part of their tradition -- by the reformists in Social Democratic Parties. For orthodox Marxists, the mass strike was linked to anarchism and Engels had proven that only political

action -- i.e. electioneering -- could lead to working class emancipation.)

Thus, according to McNally, "syndicalism" (i.e. Bakunin's ideas) is "*much superior to classical anarchism*" (i.e. Bakunin's ideas)! How spurious McNally's argument actually is can be seen from his comments about syndicalism and its relation to anarchism.

10. Do syndicalists reject working class political action?

His last argument against syndicalism is equally flawed. He states that "*by rejecting the idea of working class political action, syndicalism has never been able to give real direction to attempts by workers to change society.*" However, syndicalists (like all anarchists) are clear what kind of politics they reject -- bourgeois politics (i.e. the running of candidates in elections). It is worth quoting Rudolf Rocker at length on McNally's claim:

"It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalists from the modern labour parties, both in principle and in tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view. . .

"The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism toward the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes toward the system of capitalist exploitation. . . [and so] Anarcho-Syndicalists pursue the same tactics in their fight against that political power which finds its expression in the state. . .

"For just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country. . . It is, therefore, utterly absurd to assert that the Anarcho-Syndicalists take no interest in the political struggles of the time. . . But the point of attack in the political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people. . . If they, nevertheless, reject any participation in the work of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and the most hopeless form of the political struggle. . .

"But, most important of all, practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity cripples their power of resistance and dooms to futility their warfare against the existing system. . .

"Anarcho-Syndicalists, then, are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle, too, must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic power which the working class has at its command are the most effective. . .

"The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the

economic fighting organisations of the workers. It is the recognition of this which impelled the Anarcho-Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power. Their method is that of direct action in both the economic and the political struggles of the time. That is the only method which has been able to achieve anything at all in every decisive moment in history." [Op. Cit., pp. 63-66]

Rocker's work, **Anarcho-Syndicalism** was written in 1938 and is considered the standard introduction to that theory. McNally wrote his pamphlet in the 1980s and did not bother to consult the classic introduction to the ideas he claims to be refuting. That in itself indicates the worth of his pamphlet and any claims it has for being remotely accurate with respect to anarchism and syndicalism.

Thus syndicalists **do** reject working class "political action" only if you think "political action" means simply bourgeois politics -- that is, electioneering, standing candidates for Parliament, local town councils and so on. It does not reject "political action" in the sense of direct action to effect political changes and reforms. As syndicalists Ford and Foster argue, syndicalists use "the term 'political action' . . . in its ordinary and correct sense. Parliamentary action resulting from the exercise of the franchise is political action. Parliamentary action caused by the influence of direct action tactics . . . is not political action. It is simply a registration of direct action." They also note that syndicalists "have proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action." [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 19f and p. 23]

A historian of the British syndicalist movement reiterates this point:

*"Nor did syndicalists neglect politics and the state. Revolutionary industrial movements were on the contrary highly 'political' in that they sought to understand, challenge and destroy the structure of capitalist power in society. They quite clearly perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed." [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900-1914**, pp. 21-2]*

As we argued in [section J.2.10](#), anarchist support for direct action and opposition to taking part in elections does not mean we are "apolitical" or reject political action. Anarchists have always been clear -- we reject "political action" which is bourgeois in nature in favour of "political action" based on the organisations, action and solidarity of working class people. This is because electioneering corrupts those who take part, watering down their radical ideas and making them part of the system they were meant to change.

And history has proven the validity of our anti-electioneering ideas. For example, as we argue in [section J.2.6](#), the net result of the Marxists use of electioneering ("political action") was the de-radicalising of their movement and theory and its becoming yet another barrier to working class self-liberation. Rather than syndicalism not giving "real direction to attempts by workers to change society" it was Marxism in the shape of Social Democracy which did that. Indeed, at the turn of twentieth century more and more radicals turned to Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism as the means of by-passing the dead-weight of Social Democracy (i.e. orthodox Marxism), its reformism, opportunism and its bureaucracy. As Lenin once put it, anarchism "was not

infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 305]

Lenin's claim that anarchist and syndicalist support in the working class is the result of the opportunist nature of the Social Democratic Parties has an element of truth. Obviously militants sick to death of the reformist, corrupt and bureaucratic "working class" parties will seek a revolutionary alternative and find libertarian socialism.

However, Lenin seeks to explain the symptoms (opportunism) and not the disease itself (Parliamentarianism). Nowhere does Lenin see the rise of "opportunist" tendencies in the Marxist parties as the result of the tactics and organisational struggles they used. Indeed, Lenin desired the new Communist Parties to practice electioneering ("political action") and work within the trade unions to capture their leadership positions. Anarchists rather point out that given the nature of the means, the ends surely follow. Working in a bourgeois environment (Parliament) will result in bourgeoisifying and de-radicalising the party. Working in a centralised environment will empower the leaders of the party over the members and lead to bureaucratic tendencies.

In other words, as Bakunin predicted, using bourgeois institutions will corrupt "revolutionary" and radical parties and tie the working class to the current system. Lenin's analysis of anarchist influence as being the off-spring of opportunist tendencies in mainstream parties may be right, but if so its a natural development as the tactics supported by Marxists inevitably lead to opportunist tendencies developing. Thus, what Lenin could not comprehend was that opportunism was the symptom and electioneering was the disease -- using the same means (electioneering) with different parties/individuals ("Communists" instead of "Social Democrats") and thinking that opportunism would not return was idealistic nonsense in the extreme.

11. Why is McNally's claim that Leninism supports the principle of working class self-emancipation is wrong?

McNally claims that Marx *"was the first major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation -- the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class -- a fundamental aspect of the socialist project."* This is not entirely true. Proudhon in 1848 had argued that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government."* [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography**, p. 125] This was because the state *"finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat."* [Proudhon, **System of Economical Contradictions**, p. 399] Thus, working class people must organise themselves for their own liberation:

"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." [Op. Cit., p. 398]

While Proudhon placed his hopes in reformist tendencies (such as workers' co-operatives and mutual banks) he clearly argued that *"the proletariat must emancipate itself."* Marx's use of the

famous expression -- "*the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself*" -- dates from 1865, 17 years after Proudhon's comment that "*the proletariat must emancipate itself.*" As K. Steven Vincent correctly summarises:

"Proudhon insisted that the revolution could only come from below, through the action of the workers themselves." [**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 157]

Indeed, as Libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick points out, Marx was not even the first person to use the expression "*the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.*" Flora Tristan used it in 1843. [**Marx and Keynes**, p. 333] Thus a case could be made that Marx was, in fact, the **third** "*major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation -- the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class -- a fundamental aspect of the socialist project.*"

Similarly, Bakunin continually quoted Marx's (and so Tristan's) words from the Preamble to the General Rules of the First International -- "*That the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themselves.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 92] Far more than Marx, Bakunin argued that workers' can only free themselves by a "*single path, that of emancipation through practical action*" namely "*workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses*" by trades unions and solidarity. The "*collective experience*" workers gain in the International combined with the "*collective struggle of the workers against the bosses*" will ensure workers "*will necessarily come to realise that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the henchmen of reaction and [their] own dearest human concerns. Having reached this point, [they] will recognise [themselves] to be a revolutionary socialist.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 103] In contrast Marx placed his hopes for working class self-emancipation on a political party which would conquer "political power." As history soon proved, Marx was mistaken -- "political power" can only be seized by a minority (i.e. the party, **not** the class it claims to represent) and if the few have the power, the rest are no longer free (i.e. they no longer govern themselves). That the many elect the few who issue them orders does **not** signify emancipation!

However, this is beside the point. McNally proudly places his ideas in the Leninist tradition. It is thus somewhat ironic that McNally claims that Marxism is based on self-emancipation of the working class while claiming Leninism as a form of Marxism. This is because Lenin explicitly stated the opposite, namely that the working class **could not** liberate itself by its own actions. In **What is to be Done?** Lenin argued that "*the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness . . . The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism], however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals . . . the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.*" This meant that "*Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness . . . could only be brought to them from without.*" [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 74-5]

Thus, rather than believe in working class self-emancipation, Lenin thought the opposite. Without the radical bourgeois to provide the working class with "socialist" ideas, a socialist

movement, let alone society, was impossible. Hardly what you would consider self-emancipation. Nor is this notion of working class passivity confined to the "early" Lenin of **What is to Be Done?** infamy. It can be found in his apparently more "libertarian" work **The State and Revolution**.

In that work he argues "*we do not indulge in 'dreams' of dispensing **at once** . . . with all subordination; these anarchist dreams . . . are totally alien to Marxism . . . we want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'managers'*" [Op. Cit., p. 307] No where is the notion that working class people, during the process of mass struggle, direct action and revolution, **revolutionise themselves** (see sections [A.2.7](#) and [J.7.2](#), for example). Instead, we find a vision of people as they are under capitalism ("*human nature as it is now*") and no vision of self-emancipation of the working class and the resulting changes that implies for those who are transforming society by their own action.

Perhaps it will be argued that Lenin sees "*subordination*" as being "*to the armed vanguard of all the exploited . . . i.e., to the proletariat*" [Ibid.] and so there is no contradiction. However, this is not the case as he confuses the rule of the party with the rule of the class. As he states "*[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions.*" [Op. Cit., p. 306] Thus "*subordination*" is **not** to the working class itself (i.e. direct democracy or self-management). Rather it is the "*subordination*" of the majority to the minority, of the working class to "its" representatives. Thus we have a vision of a "socialist" society in which the majority have not revolutionised themselves and are subordinated to their representatives. Such a subordination, however, ensures that a socialist consciousness **cannot** develop as only the **process** of self-management generates the abilities required for self-management (as Malatesta put it, "*[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.*" [Life and Ideas, p. 59]).

Therefore McNally's comments that Leninism is a valid expression of Marx's idea of proletarian self-emancipation is false. In reality, Lenin rejected the idea that working class people can emancipate themselves and, therefore, any claim that this tradition stands for proletarian self-emancipation is false. Rather Leninism, for all its rhetoric, has no vision of working class self-activity leading to self-liberation -- it denies it can happen and that is why it stresses the role of the party and its need to take centralised power into its own hands (of course, it never entered Lenin's mind that if bourgeois ideology imposes itself onto the working class it also imposes itself on the party as well -- more so as they are bourgeois intellectuals in the first place).

While anarchists are aware of the need for groups of like minded individuals to influence the class struggle and spread anarchist ideas, we reject the idea that such ideas have to be "injected" into the working class from outside. Rather, as we argued in [section J.3](#), anarchist ideas are developed within the class struggle by working people themselves. Anarchist groups exist because we are aware that there is an uneven development of ideas within our class and to aid the spreading of libertarian ideas it is useful for those with those ideas to work together. However, being aware that our ideas are the product of working class life and struggle we are also aware that we have to learn from that struggle. It is because of this that anarchists stress self-management of working class struggle and organisation from below. Anarchists are (to use

Bakunin's words) *"convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 237] Only when this happens can new ways of life be created and truly develop freely. It also explains anarchist opposition to political groups seizing power -- that will only result in old dogmas crushing the initiative of people in struggle and the new forms of life they create. That is why anarchists stress the importance of revolutionaries using *"natural influence"* (i.e. arguing their ideas in popular organisations and convincing by reason) -- doing so allows new developments and ideas to be expressed and enriched by existing ones and vice versa.

One last point. It could be argued that Lenin's arguments were predated by Marx and Engels and so Marxism **as such** rather than just Leninism does not believe in proletarian self-emancipation. This is because they wrote in **The Communist Manifesto** that *"a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole."* They also note that the Communists are *"the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties . . . [and] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement."* [Selected Works, p. 44 and p. 46] Thus a portion of the bourgeois comprehend *"the historical movement as a whole"* and this is also the *"advantage"* of the Communist Party over *"the great mass of the proletariat."* Perhaps Lenin's comments are not so alien to the Marxist tradition after all.

12. Why is Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism contradictory?

Another ironic aspect of McNally's pamphlet is his praise for the Paris Commune and the Russian Soviets. This is because key aspects of both revolutionary forms were predicted by Proudhon and Bakunin.

For example, McNally's and Marx's praise for revocable mandates in the Commune was advocated by Proudhon in 1840s and Bakunin in 1860s (see sections [4](#) and [5](#)). Similarly, the Russian Soviets (a federation of delegates from workplaces) showed a marked similarity with Bakunin's discussions of revolutionary change and the importance of industrial associations being the basis of the future socialist commune (as he put it, the *"future organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by free association or free federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 206]).

Indeed, the Paris Commune (in both its economic and political aspects) showed a clear inspiration from Proudhon's works. In the words of George Woodcock, there are *"demands in the Commune's Manifesto to the French People of the 19th April, 1871, that might have been written by Proudhon himself."* [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography, p. 276] K. Steven Vincent also points out that the declaration *"is strongly federalist in tone [one of Proudhon's favourite ideas], and it has a marked proudhonian flavour."* [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French

Republican Socialism, p. 232] Moreover, the desire to replace wage labour with associated labour by the creation of co-operatives expressed during the Commune clearly showed the influence of Proudhon (see [section A.5.1](#) for more details). As Marx mentions the "*rough sketch of national organisation*" produced by the Commune it is useful to quote the Commune's declaration in order to show clearly its anarchist roots and tendencies:

"The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all districts of France . . . to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and aptitudes, as man, citizen, and worker.

"The autonomy of the Commune shall have no limits other than the right of autonomy equally enjoyed by all other communes adhering to the contract, and by whose association together French Unity will be preserved. . . Selection by ballot . . . with the responsibility and permanent right of control and dismissal of magistrates and all communal civil servants of all grades . . . Permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free expression of their ideas. Organisation of urban defence and of the National Guard, which elects its leaders . . . the large central administration delegated by the federation of communes shall adopt and put into practice these same principles.

"The Unity which has been imposed on us up to now . . . is nothing but despotic centralisation . . . The Political Unity which Paris desires is the voluntary association of all local initiatives . . .

"The Communal Revolution . . . spells the end of the old world with its governments and its clerics, militarism, officialdom, exploitation, stock-jobbing, monopolies, and privileges, to which the proletariat owes its servitude, the country its ills and its disasters." ["Declaration to the French People", contained in David Thomson (ed.), **France: Empire and Republic, 1850-1940**, pp. 186-7]

The links with Proudhon's ideas cannot be clearer. Both Proudhon and the Commune stressed the importance of decentralisation of power, federalism, the end of both government and exploitation and so on. Moreover, in his letter to Albert Richard, Bakunin predicted many aspects of the Paris Commune and its declaration (see **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 177-182).

Little wonder few Marxists (nor Marx himself) directly quote from this declaration. It would be difficult to attack anarchism (as "petty-bourgeois") while proclaiming the Paris Commune as the first example of "*the dictatorship of the Proletariat*." The decentralised, federalist nature of the Commune cannot be squared with the usual Marxist instance on centralisation and the claim that federalism "*as a principle follows logically from the petty-bourgeois views of anarchism. Marx was a centralist.*" [Lenin, "*The State and Revolution*", Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 273]

Given that Marx described the Commune as "*essentially a working-class government*" and as "*the political form, at last discovered, under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour*," it is strange that McNally terms Proudhon's and Bakunin's ideas as those of the past. [Selected Writings, p. 290] In actuality, as can be seen from the Paris Commune and the soviets, they were the ideas **of the future** -- and of working class self-liberation and self-organisation. And ones that Marx and his followers paid lip service to.

(We say lip service for Lenin quoted Marx's statement that the future proletarian state, like the Paris Commune, would abolish the distinction between executive and administrative powers but did not honour it. Immediately after the October Revolution the Bolsheviks established an executive power **above** the soviets, namely the Council of People's Commissars. Those who quote Lenin's **State and Revolution** as proof of his democratic nature usually fail to mention this little fact. In practice that work was little more than an election manifesto to be broken as required.)

Perhaps it could be argued that, in fact, the Paris Commune was the work of artisans. This does have an element of truth in it. Marx stated in 1866 that the French workers were "*corrupted*" by "*Proudhonist*" ideas, "*particularly those of Paris, who as workers in luxury trades are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism**, pp. 45-6] Five years later, these workers (still obviously influenced by "*the old rubbish*") created "*the political form*" of "*the economic emancipation of labour.*" How can the Paris Commune be the "*Dictatorship of the Proletariat*" (as Engels claimed [**Selected Writings**, p. 259]) when 35 members of the Commune's council were artisans and only 4 or 5 were industrial workers (i.e. proletarians)?

Can the fact that artisans were, according to McNally and Marx, social strata of the past, were backward looking, etc. be reconciled with the claim that the Paris Commune was the political form of proletarian emancipation? No, not from a Marxist class analysis. Hence Marxists ignoring the real nature of the Parisian working class when discussing the commune. However, from an anarchist perspective -- which sees the artisan, peasant and proletariat forming a common class of working people -- the development of the Paris Commune is no surprise. It is the work of people seeking to end wage labour and the threat of wage labour **now** rather than sometime in the future once capitalism has fully developed. Thus McNally's (and Marx's) support for the Commune makes a mockery of his attacks on anarchism as the theory of the artisans and peasants for it was the artisans who created the first model of their "*proletarian*" state!

As indicated, McNally's arguments do not hold water. Ironically, if anarchism was the death-cry of the artisan and peasant then it is strange, to say the least, that this theory so influenced the Paris Commune which McNally praises so much. We therefore suggest that rather than being a backward-looking cry of despair for those disappearing under the wheels of rising capitalism, anarchism was in fact a theory developed from the struggles and self-activity of those currently suffering capitalist and state oppression -- namely the artisans, peasants **and** industrial proletariat (i.e. the working class as a whole). In other words, it is a philosophy and theory for the future, not of the past. This can be seen from the libertarian aspects of the Paris Commune, aspects Marx immediately tried to appropriate for his own theories (which, unfortunately, were swamped by the authoritarian elements that existing already).

And one last point, McNally claims that Marx "*immediately rallied to the cause of the Paris Commune.*" This is not true. As John Zerzan points out "*[d]ays after the successful insurrection began he failed to applaud its audacity, and satisfied himself with grumbling that 'it had no chance of success.'* Though he finally recognised the fact of the Commune (and was thereby forced to revise his reformist ideas regarding proletarian use of existing state machinery), his

*lack of sympathy is amply reflected by the fact that throughout the Commune's two-month existence, the General Council of the International spoke not a single word about it . . . his **Civil War in France** constitutes an obituary."* [**Elements of Refusal**, p. 126] Perhaps the delay was due to Marx wondering how Parisian artisans had become the vanguard of the proletariat overnight and how he could support a Commune created by the forces of the past?

In addition the "*old rubbish*" the Parisian workers supported was very much ahead of its time. In 1869 the delegate of the Parisian Construction Workers' Trade Union argued that "*[a]ssociation of the different corporations [labour unions] on the basis of town or country . . . leads to the commune of the future . . . Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates."* In addition, "*a local grouping which allows the workers in the same area to liase on a day to day basis*" and "*a linking up of the various localities, fields, regions, etc.*" (i.e. international trade or industrial union federations) would ensure that "*labour organises for present and future by doing away with wage slavery."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 184] Such a vision of workers' councils and associated labour has obvious similarities with the spontaneously created soviets of the 1905 Russian Revolution. These, too, were based on assembled councils of workers' delegates. Of course they were differences but the basic idea and vision are identical.

Therefore to claim that anarchism represents the past presents Marxists with a few problems given the nature of the Paris Commune and its obvious libertarian nature. If it is claimed that the Parisian artisans defended "*not their present, but their future interests*" and so "*desert[ed] their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat*" (the class they are being "*transfer[ed]*" into by the rise of capitalism) then, clearly, anarchist ideas are "*future,*" proletarian, ideas as it is that class interest artisans serve "*[i]f by chance they are revolutionary."* [Marx and Engels, **The Communist Manifesto**, p. 44]

Whichever way you look at it, McNally's claims on the class nature of anarchism do not stand up to close analysis. Proudhon addressed both artisan/peasant and wage slave in his works. He addressed both the past and the present working class. Bakunin did likewise (although with a stronger emphasis on wage slaves). Therefore it is not surprising that Proudhon and Bakunin predicted aspects of the Paris Commune -- they were expressing the politics of the future. As is clear from their writings, which still remain fresh today.

This confusion associated with Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism was also present in Lenin. Given that anarchism is apparently associated with the petty-bourgeois we find a strange contradiction in Lenin's work. On the one hand Lenin argued that Russia "*despite the more petty-bourgeois composition of her population as compared with the other European countries*" had, in fact, "*negligible*" anarchist influence during the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917. He claimed that this was due to Bolshevism's having "*waged a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism."* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 305]

On the other he admitted that, in the developed capitalist nations, anarchists and syndicalists were "*quite revolutionary and connected with the masses*" and that it is "*the duty of all Communists to do everything to help all proletarian mass elements to abandon anarchism . . . the measure in which genuinely Communist parties succeed in winning mass proletarian*

elements . . . away from anarchism, is a criterion of the success of those Parties." [Op. Cit., pp. 317-8]

Thus, in the most capitalist nations, ones with a more widespread and developed proletariat, the anarchist and syndicalist movements were more firmly developed and had closer connections with the masses than in Russia. Moreover, these movements were also quite revolutionary as well and should be won to Bolshevism. But anarchism is the politics of the petit-bourgeois and so should have been non-existent in Western countries but widespread in Russia. The opposite was the case, thus suggesting that Lenin's analysis is wrong.

We can point to another explanation of these facts. Rather than the Bolsheviks "*struggle against opportunism*" being the reason why anarchism was "*negligible*" in 1917-18 in Russia (it was not, in fact) but had mass appeal in Western Europe perhaps it was the fact that anarchism was a product of working class struggle in advanced capitalist countries while Bolshevism was a product of **bourgeois** struggle (for Parliament, a liberal republic, etc.) in Tsarist Russia?

Similarly, perhaps the reason why Bolshevism did not develop opportunist tendencies was because it did not work in an environment which encouraged them. After all, unlike the German Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks were illegal for long periods of time and worked in an absolutist monarchy. The influences that corrupted the German SPD were not at work in the Tsarist regime. Thus, Bolshevism, perhaps at best, was applicable to Tsarist conditions and anarchism to Western ones.

However, as noted and contrary to Lenin, Russian anarchism was far from "*negligible*" during 1917-18 and was growing which was why the Bolsheviks suppressed them **before** the start of the civil war. As Emma Goldman noted, a claim such as Lenin's "*does not tally with the incessant persecution of Anarchists which began in [April] 1918, when Leon Trotsky liquidated the Anarchist headquarters in Moscow with machine guns. At that time the process of elimination of the Anarchists began.*" [Trotsky Protests Too Much] This fact of anarchist influence during the revolution does not contradict our earlier analysis. This is because the Russian anarchists, rather than appealing to the petit-bourgeois, were influencing exactly the same workers, sailors and soldiers the Bolsheviks were. Indeed, the Bolsheviks often had to radicalise their activities and rhetoric to counter anarchist influence. As Alexander Rabinowitch (in his study of the July uprising of 1917) notes:

"At the rank-and-file level, particularly within the [Petrograd] garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base, there was in fact very little to distinguish Bolshevik from Anarchist. . . The Anarchist-Communists and the Bolsheviks competed for the support of the same uneducated, depressed, and dissatisfied elements of the population, and the fact is that in the summer of 1917, the Anarchist-Communists, with the support they enjoyed in a few important factories and regiments, possessed an undeniable capacity to influence the course of events. Indeed, the Anarchist appeal was great enough in some factories and military units to influence the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves."

[Prelude to Revolution, p. 64]

This is hardly what would be expected if anarchism was "petit-bourgeois" as Marxists assert.

It could, in fact, be argued that the Bolsheviks gained the support of so many working class people (wage slaves) during the summer of 1917 **because they sounded and acted like anarchists** and **not** like Marxists. At the time many considered the Bolsheviks as anarchists and one fellow Marxist (an ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik) thought Lenin had "*made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years -- the throne of Bakunin!*" [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 40] As Alexander Berkman argues, the "*Anarchist mottoes proclaimed by the Bolsheviks did not fail to bring results. The masses relied to their flag.*" [**What is Communist Anarchism**, p. 101]

Moreover, this stealing of anarchist slogans and tactics was **forced** upon the Bolsheviks by the working class. On Lenin's own admission, the masses of peasants and workers were "*a hundred times further to the left*" than the Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself notes that the Bolsheviks "*lagged behind the revolutionary dynamic . . . The masses at the turning point were a hundred times to the left of the extreme left party.*" [**History of the Russian Revolution**, Vol. 1, p. 403f] Indeed, one leading Bolshevik stated in June, 1917 (in response to a rise in anarchist influence), "*[b]y fencing ourselves off from the Anarchists, we may fence ourselves off from the masses.*" [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] That, in itself, indicates the weakness of Lenin's class analysis of anarchism.

Rather than seeing the Russian experience refute the claim that anarchism is a working class theory, it reinforces it -- the Bolsheviks would not have succeeded if they had used traditional Marxist slogans and tactics. Instead, much to the dismay of their more orthodox comrades, the Bolsheviks embraced traditional anarchist ideas and tactics and thereby gained increased influence in the working class. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in the name of the soviets, anarchist influence increased (see [section A.5.4](#)) as more working people recognised that what the Bolsheviks meant by their slogans was different than what working people thought they meant!

Thus the experience of the Russian Revolution re-enforces the fact that Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism fails to convince. Far from proving that libertarian socialism is non-proletariat, that Revolution proved that it was (just as confirmed the prophetic correctness of the views of the founders of anarchism and, in particular, their critique of Marxism).

The usual Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism is somewhat confused. On the one hand, it claims that anarchism is backward looking and the politics of the petit-bourgeois being destroyed by the rise and development of capitalism. On the other hand Marxists point to events and organisations created in working class struggle which were predicted and/or influenced by **anarchist** ideas and ideals, **not** Marxist ones. That indicates better than any other argument that Marxists are wrong about anarchism and their "class analysis" nothing more than distortions and bigotry.

Based on the evidence and the contradictions it provokes in Marxist ideology, we have to argue that McNally is simply wrong. Rather than being an ideology of the petit-bourgeois anarchism is, in fact, a political theory of the working class (both artisans and proletariat). Rather than a backward looking theory, anarchism is a theory of the present and future -- it has a concrete and radical critique of current society and a vision of the future and a theory how to get there which

appeals to working people in struggle. Such is obviously the case when reading anarchist theory.

13. If Marxism is "*socialism from below*," why do anarchists reject it?

McNally claims that Marxism is "*socialism from below*." In his text he indicates support for the Paris Commune and the soviets of the Russian Revolution. He states that the "*democratic and socialist restructuring of society remains . . . the most pressing task confronting humanity. And such a reordering of society can only take place on the basis of the principles of socialism from below. Now more than ever, the liberation of humanity depends upon the self-emancipation of the world working class. . . The challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom.*"

So, if this is the case, why the hostility between anarchists and Marxists? Surely it is a question of semantics? No, for while Marxists pay lip-service to such developments of working class self-activity and self-organisation as workers' councils (soviets), factory committees, workers' control, revocable and mandated delegates they do so in order to ensure the election of their party into positions of power (i.e. the government). Rather than see such developments as working people's **direct** management of their own destinies (as anarchists do) and as a means of creating a self-managed (i.e. free) society, Marxists see them as a means for their party to take over state power. Nor do they see them as a framework by which working class people can take back control of their own lives. Rather, they see them, at best, as typical bourgeois forms -- namely the means by which working people can delegate their power to a new group of leaders, i.e. as a means to elect a socialist government into power.

This attitude can be seen from Lenin's perspectives on the Russian soviets. Rather than seeing them as a means of working class self-government, he saw them purely as a means of gaining influence for his party. In his own words:

"the Party . . . has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies . . . to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement . . . the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party working-class institutions, such as Soviets . . . for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 209-10]

Such a perspective indicates well the difference between anarchism and Leninism. Anarchists do not seek power for their own organisations. Rather they see self-managed organisation created by working class people in struggle as a means of eliminating hierarchy within society, of directly involving the mass of people in the decisions that affect them. In other words, as a means of creating the organisations through which people can change both themselves and the world by their own direct action and the managing of their own struggles, lives, communities and

workplaces. For Leninists, view working class self-organisation as a means of gaining power for their own party (which they identify with the power of the working class). Mass organisations, which could be schools for self-management and freedom, are instead subjected to an elitist leadership of intellectual ideologues. The party soon substitutes itself for the mass movement, and the party leadership substitutes itself the party.

Despite its radical language, Leninism is totally opposed to the nature of revolt, rebellion and revolution. It seeks to undermine what makes these organisations and activities revolutionary (their tendencies towards self-management, decentralisation, solidarity, direct action, free activity and co-operation) by using them to build their party and, ultimately, a centralised, hierarchical state structure on the corpse of these once revolutionary forms of working class self-organisation and self-activity.

Lenin's view of the soviets was instrumental: he regarded them merely as a means for educating the working class (i.e. of getting them to support the Bolshevik Party) and enlisting them in the service of his party. Indeed, he constantly confused soviet power with party power, seeing the former as the means to the latter and the latter as the key to creating socialism. What is missing from his vision is the idea of socialism as being based on working class self-activity, self-management and self-government (*"Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power."* [A. S. Smith, **Red Petrograd**, pp. 261-2] And the 'proletarian' character of the state was determined by the party in government). And this gap in his politics, this confusion of party with class, which helped undermine the revolution and create the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Little wonder that by the end of 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled the newly established soviet state entirely alone and had turned the soviets into docile instruments of their party apparatus rather than forms of working class self-government.

For Lenin and other Bolsheviks the party of the proletariat, that is, **their** party, must strive to monopolise political power, if only to safeguard the proletarian character of the revolution. This follows naturally from Lenin's vanguardist politics (see [section 11](#)). As the working class people cannot achieve anything bar a trade union consciousness by their own efforts, it would be insane for the Party to let them govern directly. In the words of Lenin:

"Syndicalism hands over to the mass of non-Party workers . . . the management of their industries . . . thereby making the Party superfluous. . . Why have a Party, if industrial management is to be appointed . . . by trade unions nine-tenths of whose members are non-Party workers?" [Op. Cit., pp. 319-20]

"Does every worker know how to run the state? . . . this is not true . . . If we say that it is not the Party but the trade unions that put up the candidates and administrate, it may sound very democratic . . . It will be fatal for the dictatorship of the proletariat." [Op. Cit. p. 322]

"To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party. All this syndicalist nonsense about mandatory nominations of producers must go into the wastepaper basket. To proceed on those lines would mean thrusting the Party aside and making the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . impossible." [Op. Cit., p.

323]

In other words, giving the proletariat the power to elect their own managers means to destroy the "dictatorship" of the proletariat! Lenin clearly places the power of the party above the ability of working people to elect their own representatives and managers. And McNally claims that his tradition aims at "workers' power" and a "direct and active democracy"!

Lenin's belief that working class people could not liberate themselves (see [section 11](#)) explains his continual emphasis on **representative** democracy and centralism -- simply put, the party must have power **over** the working class as that class could not be trusted to make the right decisions (i.e. know what its "real" interests were). At best they would be allowed to vote for the government, but even this right could be removed if they voted for the wrong people (see [section 8](#)). For Leninists, revolutionary consciousness is not generated by working class self-activity in the class struggle, but is embodied in the party ("*Since there can there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology*" [Lenin, **The Essential Works of Lenin**, 82]). The important issues facing the working class are to be determined not by the workers ourselves, but by the leadership of the party, who are the (self appointed) "*vanguard of the proletariat*". The nature of the relationship between the party and the working class is clear, however, we remain incapable of achieving revolutionary consciousness and have to be led by the vanguard.

Russia, Lenin once said, "*was accustomed to being ruled by 150 000 land owners. Why can 240 000 Bolsheviks not take over the task?*" [**Collected Works**, Vol 21, p. 336] The idea of socialism as working class self-management and self-government was lost on him -- and the possibility **real** socialism was soon lost to the Russian working class when the Tsar was replaced by the autocratic the rule of the Bolshevik Party. "*Workers' power*" cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party -- as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks (and Social Democrats before them).

Thus Malatesta's comments:

"The important, fundamental dissension [between anarchists and Marxists] is [that] . . . [Marxist] socialists are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.

"Socialists want power . . . and once in power wish to impose their programme on the people. . . Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its very nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one." [**Life and Ideas**, p. 142]

Anarchists seek to influence people by the power of our ideas within popular organisations. We see such organisations as the means by which working people can take control of their own lives and start to create a free, libertarian socialist society. A self-managed society can only be created by self-management, in short, and any tendencies to undermine popular self-management in favour of hierarchical power of a party will subvert a revolution and create an end drastically at odds with the ideals of those who take part in it.

Similarly, anarchists reject the Leninist idea of highly centralised "vanguard" parties. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

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

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

*"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events . . . In the beginning . . . it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines **that reflect the very society it professes to oppose** . . . Its membership is schooled in obedience . . . The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation . . . Its leaders . . . lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently. . .*

"The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns -- as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect -- in moulding society in its own hierarchical imagine if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of 'withering away,' the state controlled by the 'glorious party' preserves the very conditions which 'necessitate' the existence of a state -- and a party to 'guard' it." [Post-Scarcity Anarchism pp. 194-198]

As we argue in [section J.3](#), anarchists do not reject the need for political organisations (anarchist groups, federations and so on) to work in mass movements and in revolutionary situations. However, we do reject the Leninist idea of a vanguard party as being totally inappropriate for the needs of a social revolution -- a revolution that aims to create a free society.

In addition to this difference in the **political** nature of a socialist society, the role of organisations created in, by and for the class struggle and the nature of socialist organisation, anarchists and Marxists disagree with the **economic** nature of the future society.

McNally claims that in Russia "[c]ontrol of the factories was taken over by the workers" but this is a total distortion of what actually happened. Throughout 1917, it was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers' self-management and control. As S.A. Smith puts it, the "factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up." [Red Petrograd, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism is wage labour, the Russian workers' raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, who failed to raise above a "trade union conscious" in this and so many other cases.

In reality, the Bolsheviks themselves hindered the movement of workers trying to control, and then manage, the factories they worked in. As Maurice Brinton correctly argued, "it is ridiculous to claim -- as so many do today -- that in 1917 the Bolsheviks really stood for the full, total and direct control by working people of the factories, mines, building sites or other enterprises in which they worked, i.e. that they stood for workers' self-management." [The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, p. 27] Rather, Lenin identified "workers' control" as something totally different:

"When we speak of 'workers control,' always placing this cry side by side with the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . we make clear thereby what State we have in mind . . . if we have in mind a proletarian State -- that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat -- then the workers' control can become a national, all-embracing, universally realisable, most exact and most conscientious regulating of the production and distribution of goods."
[Can the Bolsheviks Maintain State Power?, pp. 46-7]

By "regulation" Lenin meant the "power" to oversee the books, to check the implementation of decisions made by others, rather than fundamental decision making. As he argued, "the economists, engineers, agricultural experts and so on . . . [will] work out plans under the control of the workers' organisations . . . We are in favour of centralisation." [Op. Cit., pp. 78-9] Thus others would determine the plans, not the workers themselves. As Brinton states, "[n]owhere in Lenin's writings is workers' control ever equated with fundamental decision-taking (i.e. with the **initiation** of decisions) relating to production . . . He envisioned a period during which, in a workers state, the bourgeois would still retain the formal ownership and effective management of most of the productive apparatus . . . capitalists would be coerced into co-operation. 'Workers' control' was seen as the instrument of this coercion." [Op. Cit., pp. 12-13] In Lenin's own words, "[t]here is no other way . . . than . . . organisation of really democratic control, i.e. control 'from below,' of the workers and poorest peasants **over** the capitalists." [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 33]

Thus the capitalists would remain and wage slavery would continue but workers could "control" those who had the real power and gave the orders (the capitalists were later replaced by state bureaucrats though the lack of effective control remained). In other words, no vision of workers' self-management in production (and so real socialism) and the reduction of "socialism" to a warmed up variation of state capitalism with (in theory, but not in practice) a dash of liberal democracy in the form of "control" of those with the real power by those under them in the hierarchy.

S.A. Smith correctly argues that Lenin's "*proposals . . . [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character*" and that he used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees.*" [Op. Cit., p. 154] That is, he used the same slogans as many workers' but meant something radically different by it. Leninists follow this tradition today, as can be seen from McNally's use of the words "*[c]ontrol of the factories was taken over by the workers*" to refer to situation drastically different from the workers' self-management it implies to most readers.

Given Lenin's lack of concern about the revolutionising of the relations of production (a lack not shared by the Russian workers, we must note) it is hardly surprising that Lenin considered the first task of the Bolshevik revolution was to build state capitalism. "*State capitalism,*" he wrote, "*is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps.*" [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 259] Hence his support for centralisation and his full support for "*one-man management*" -- working class power **in production** is never mentioned as a necessary condition for socialism.

Little wonder Soviet Russia never progressed beyond state capitalism -- it could not as the fundamental aspect of capitalism, wage labour, was never replaced by workers' self-management of production.

Lenin took the viewpoint that socialism "*is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly.*" [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 37] He had no real notion of workers' self-management of production nor of the impossibilities of combining the centralised state capitalist system with its big banks, monopolies, big business with genuine rank and file control, never mind self-management. As Alexander Berkman correctly argued:

"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated. . . Most people are still in the thrall of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class." [The ABC of Anarchism, pp. 80-1]

However, this is what Lenin aimed at. The Leninist "vision" of the future socialist economy is one of a highly centralised organisation, modelled on capitalism, in which, at best, workers can supervise the decisions made by others and "control" those in power. It is a vision of a more democratic corporate structure, with the workers replacing the shareholders. In practice, it would be a new bureaucracy exploiting and oppressing those who do the actual work -- as in private capitalism -- simply because capitalist economic structures are designed to empower the few over the many. Like the capitalist state, they cannot be used by the working class to achieve their

liberation (they are not created for the mass participation that real socialism requires, quite the reverse in fact!).

In contrast, anarchists view the socialist economy as being based on workers' self-management of production and the workplace turned into an association of equals. Above the individual workplace, federations of factory committees would co-ordinate activities and ensure wide scale co-operation is achieved. Thus anarchists see a **new** form of economic structure developing, one based on workers' organisations created in the process of struggle **against** capitalism.

In other words, rather than embrace bourgeois notions of "democracy" (i.e. the election of leaders into positions of power) like Marxists do, anarchists dissolve hierarchical power by promoting workers' self-management and association. While Marxism ends up as state capitalism pure and simple (as can be seen by the experience of Russia under Lenin and then Stalin) anarchism destroys the fundamental social relation of capitalism -- wage labour -- via association and workers' self-management of production.

Thus while both Leninists and anarchists claim to support factory committees and "workers' control" we have decidedly different notions of what we mean by this. The Leninists see them as a means of workers' to supervise those who have the real power in the economy (and so perpetuate wage slavery with the state replacing the boss). Anarchists, in contrast, see them as a means of expressing workers self-organisation, self-management and self-government -- as a means of abolishing wage slavery and so capitalism by eliminating hierarchical authority, in other words. The difference could not be more striking. Indeed, it would be correct to state that the Leninist tradition is not, in fact, socialist as it identifies socialism as the natural development of capitalism and **not** as a new form of economy which will develop **away** from capitalism by means of associated labour and workers' self-management of production.

In short, anarchists reject both the means and the ends Leninists aim for and so our disagreements with that tradition is far more than semantics.

This does not mean that all members of Leninist parties do not support workers' self-management in society and production, favour workers' democracy, actually do believe in working class self-emancipation and so on. Many do, unaware that the tradition they have joined does not actually share those values. It could, therefore, be argued that such values can be "added" to the core Leninist ideas. However, such a viewpoint is optimistic in the extreme. Leninist positions on workers' self-management, etc., do not "just happen" nor are they the product of ignorance. Rather they are the natural result of those "core" ideas. To add other values to Leninism would be like adding extensions to a house built on sand -- the foundations are unsuitable and any additions would soon fall down. This was what happened during the Russian Revolution -- movements from below which had a different vision of socialism came to grief on the rocks of Bolshevik power.

The issue is clear -- either you aim for a socialist society and use socialist methods to get there or you do not. Those who do seek a **real** socialism (as opposed to warmed up state capitalism) would be advised to consider anarchism which is truly "*socialism from below*" (see [next section](#)).

14. Why is McNally's use of the term "*socialism from below*" dishonest?

McNally argues that Marxism can be considered as "*socialism from below*." Indeed, that is the name of his pamphlet. However, his use of the term is somewhat ironic for two reasons.

Firstly, this is because the expression "*from below*" was constantly on the lips of Bakunin and Proudhon. For example, in 1848, Proudhon was talking about being a "*revolutionary from below*" and that every "*serious and lasting Revolution*" was "*made from below, by the people.*" A "*Revolution from above*" was "*pure governmentalism,*" "*the negation of collective activity, of popular spontaneity*" and is "*the oppression of the wills of those below.*" [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 143] Similarly, Bakunin saw an anarchist revolution as coming "*from below.*" As he put it, "*liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.*" [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] Elsewhere he writes that "*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*" [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206]

No such idea is present in Marx. Rather, he saw a revolution as consisting of the election of a socialist party into government. Therefore, the idea of "*socialism from below*" is a distinctly anarchist notion, one found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin, **not** Marx. It is ironic, given his distorted account of Proudhon and Bakunin that McNally uses their words to describe Marxism!

Secondly, and far more serious for McNally, Lenin dismissed the idea of "*from below*" as not Marxist. As he wrote in 1905 (and using Engels as an authority to back him up) "*the principle, 'only from below' is an anarchist principle.*" [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 192] In this he followed Marx, who commented that Bakunin's expression "*the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards*" was "*nonsense.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153] For Lenin, Marxists must be in favour of "*From above as well as from below*" and "*renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 196, p. 189] McNally does not mention "*from above*" in his pamphlet and so gives his account of Marxism a distinctly anarchist feel (while denouncing it in a most deceitful way). Why is this? Because, according to Lenin, "*[p]ressure from below is pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government. Pressure from above is pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens.*" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 189-90]

In other words, Marxism is based on idea that the government pressuring the citizens is acceptable. Given that Marx and Engels had argued in **The Holy Family** that the "*question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do*" the idea of "*from above*" takes on frightening overtones. [quoted by Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 280] As Murray Bookchin argues:

"These lines and others like them in Marx's writings were to provide the rationale for

asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation than 'even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,' Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership. [Op. Cit., p. 289]

A given ideological premise will lead to certain conclusions in practice -- conclusions Lenin and Trotsky were not shy in explicitly stating.

Little wonder McNally fails to mention Lenin's support for revolutionary action "from above." As we proved above (in [section 8](#)), in practice Leninism substitutes the dictatorship of the party for that of the working class as a whole. This is unsurprising, given its confusion of working class power and party power. For example, Lenin once wrote "the power of the Bolsheviks -- that is, the power of the proletariat" while, obviously, these two things **are** different. [Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?, p. 102] Trotsky makes the same identification of party dictatorship with popular self-government:

"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 . . . the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole." [Terrorism and Communism, p. 109]

In this confusion, we must note, they follow Engels who argued that "each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party is striving to establish *its* rule, the rule of the working class." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism** p. 94]

Such confusion is deadly to a true "revolution from below" and justifies the use of repression against the working class -- they do not understand their own "fundamental interests," only the party does. Anarchists recognise that parties and classes are different and only self-management in popular organisations from below upwards can ensure that a social revolution remains in the hands of all and not a source of power for the few. Thus "All Power to the Soviets," for anarchists, means **exactly** that -- not a euphemism for "All Power to the Party." As Voline made clear:

"[F]or, the anarchists declared, if 'power' really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets." [The Unknown Revolution, p. 213]

Marxist confusion of the difference between working class power and party power, combined with the nature of centralised power and an ideology which claims to "comprehend" the "real" interests of the people cannot help but lead to the rise of a ruling bureaucracy, pursuing "from above" their own power and privileges.

"All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it," argued Voline. *"Thus is violated, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution . . . [and] becomes the source of other privileges . . . power is compelled to create a bureaucratic and coercive apparatus indispensable to all authority . . . Thus it forms a new privileged caste, at first politically and later economically."* [Op. Cit., p. 249]

Thus the concept of revolution "from above" is one that inevitably leads to a new form of class rule -- rule by bureaucracy. This is not because the Bolsheviks were "bad people" -- rather it is to do with the nature of centralised power (which by its very nature can only be exercised by the few). As the anarchist Sergven argued in 1918:

"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators -- a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia . . . We do not mean to say . . . that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from centralisation. It cannot be otherwise." [The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution, pp. 123-4]

Thus McNally's use of the term "from below" is dishonest on two levels. Firstly, it is of anarchist origin and, secondly, it was repudiated by Lenin himself (who urged revolution "from below" and "from above", thus laying the groundwork for a new class system based around the Party). It goes without saying that either McNally is ignorant of his subject (and if so, why write a pamphlet on it) or he knew these facts and decided to suppress them.

Either way it shows the bankruptcy of Marxism -- it uses libertarian rhetoric for non-libertarian ends while distorting the real source of those ideas. That Lenin dismissed this rhetoric and the ideas behind them as "anarchist" says it all. McNally's (and the SWP/ISO's) use of this rhetoric and imagery is therefore deeply dishonest.

15. Did Trotsky keep alive Leninism's "democratic essence"?

McNally argues that "[d]uring the terrible decades of the 1920s and 1940s . . . the lone voice of Leon Trotsky kept alive some of the basic elements of socialism from below." He argues that it "was Trotsky's great virtue to insist against all odds that socialism was rooted in the struggle for human freedom."

There is one slight flaw with this argument, namely that it is not actually true. All through the 1920s and 1930s Trotsky, rather than argue for "socialism's democratic essence," continually argued for party dictatorship. That McNally asserts the exact opposite suggests that the ideas of anarchism are not the only ones he is ignorant of. To prove our argument, we simply need to

provide a chronological account of Trotsky's actual ideas.

We shall begin in 1920 and Trotsky's infamous work **Terrorism and Communism**. In it we discover Trotsky arguing that:

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

Of course, this was written during the Civil War and may be excused in terms of the circumstances in which it was written. Sadly for this kind of argument, Trotsky continued to argue for party dictatorship after its end. In 1921, he argued again for Party dictatorship at the Tenth Party Congress. His comments made there against the **Workers' Opposition** within the Communist Party make his position clear:

"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers' right to elect representatives - above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party, which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy." [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]

He repeated this call again, two years later. Writing in 1923, he argued that "*[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work.*" He stressed that "*[o]ur party is the ruling party . . . To allow any changes whatever in this field, to allow the idea of a partial . . . curtailment of the leading role of our party would mean to bring into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future.*" He indicated the fate of those who **did** question the party's "leading role": "*Whoever makes an attempt on the party's leading role will, I hope, be unanimously dumped by all of us on the other side of the barricade.*" [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158 and p. 160]

Which, of course, was exactly what the Bolsheviks had done to other socialists (anarchists and others) and working class militants and strikers after they had taken power.

At this point, it will be argued that this was before the rise of Stalinism and the defeat of the Left Opposition. With the rise of Stalin, many will argue that Trotsky finally rejected the idea of party dictatorship and re-embraced what McNally terms the "*democratic essence*" of socialism. Unfortunately, yet again, this argument suffers from the flaw that it is totally untrue.

Let us start with the Left Opposition. In the **Platform of the Opposition**, it will soon be discovered that Trotsky **still** did not question the issue of Party dictatorship. Indeed, it is actually stressed in that document. While it urged a "*consistent development of a workers' democracy in the party, the trade unions, and the soviets*" and to "*convert the urban soviets into real institutions of proletarian power*" it contradicted itself by, ironically, attacking Stalin for weakening the party's dictatorship. In its words, the "*growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a 'theory' of Stalin's which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party.*" Of course it did not bother to explain how workers' democracy **could** develop within a party dictatorship nor how soviets could become institutions of power when real power would, obviously, lie with the party.

It repeats this principle by arguing that "*the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry.*" It stresses that "*[n]obody who sincerely defends the line of Lenin can entertain the idea of 'two parties' or play with the suggestion of a split. Only those who desire to replace Lenin's course with some other can advocate a split or a movement along the two-party road.*" As such, "*[w]e will fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the proletariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party.*"

Trotsky did not change from this perspective even after the horrors of Stalinism which McNally correctly documents. Writing in 1937, ten years after the Platform was published, he repeats this position:

"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." [Trotsky, **Writings 1936-37**, pp. 513-4]

This point is reiterated in his essay, "*Bolshevism and Stalinism*" (written in 1937) when he argued that "*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard*" and that a "*revolutionary party, even having seized power . . . is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" [Stalinism and Bolshevism] Note, the party is "*the sovereign ruler of society,*" **not** the working class. Nor can it be said that he was not clear who held power in his system:

"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift

themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat." [Op. Cit.]

Which was, let us not forget, his argument in 1920! Such remarkable consistency on this point over a 17 year period and one which cannot be overlooked if you seek to present an accurate account of Trotsky's ideas during this period. Two years later, Trotsky repeats the same dictatorial ideas. Writing in 1939, he indicates yet again that he viewed democracy as a threat to the revolution and saw the need for party power over workers' freedom (a position, incidentally, which echoes his comments from 1921):

"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]

Such a position means denying exactly what workers' democracy is meant to be all about -- namely that working people can recall and replace their delegates when those delegates do not follow the wishes and mandates of the electors. If the governors determine what is and what is not in the "real" interests of the masses and "overcome" (i.e. repress) the governed, then we have dictatorship, not democracy. Clearly Trotsky is, yet again, arguing for party dictatorship and his comments are hardly in the spirit of individual/social freedom or democracy. Rather they mean the promotion of party power over workers' power -- a position which Trotsky had argued consistently throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

As can be seen, McNally does not present a remotely accurate account of Trotsky's ideas. All of which makes McNally's comments deeply ironic. McNally argues that *"Stalin had returned to an ideology resembling authoritarian pre-Marxian socialism. Gone was socialism's democratic essence. Stalin's 'Marxism' was a variant of socialism from above"* Clearly, Trotsky's "Marxism" was also a variant of *"socialism from above"* and without *"socialism's democratic essence"* (unless you think that party dictatorship can somehow be reconciled with democracy or expresses one of the *"basic elements of socialism from below"*). For Trotsky, as for Stalin, the dictatorship of the party was a fundamental principle of Bolshevism and one which was above democracy (which, by its very nature, expresses the *"vacillation of the masses"*).

Ironically, McNally argues that *"[t]hroughout the 1920s and until his death . . . Trotsky fought desperately to build a revolutionary socialist movement based on the principles of Marx and Lenin."* Leaving Marx to one side for the moment, McNally's comments are correct. In his support for party power and dictatorship (for a *"socialism from above,"* to use McNally's term) Trotsky was indeed following Lenin's principles. As noted in the [last section](#), Lenin had been arguing from a "socialism" based on *"above"* and *"below"* since at least 1905. The reality of Bolshevik rule (as indicated in [section 8](#)) showed, pressure *"from above"* by a "revolutionary" government easily crushes pressure *"from below."* Nor was Lenin shy in arguing for Party dictatorship. As he put it in 1920:

"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 proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation." [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

To stress the point, Lenin is clearly arguing for party power, **not** workers' power, and that party dictatorship is inevitable in **every** revolution. This position is **not** put in terms of the extreme problems facing the Russian Revolution but rather is expressed in universal terms. As such, in **this** sense, McNally is right -- by defending the dictatorship of the party Trotsky was following the "principles" laid down by Lenin.

Despite Lenin and Trotsky's dismissal of democracy, McNally argues that democracy is the core need of socialism:

"A workers' state, according to Marx and Lenin, is a state based upon workers' control of society. It depends upon the existence of democratic organisation that can control society from below. A workers' state presupposes that workers are running the state. To talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy."

Which, as far as it goes, is correct (for anarchists, of course, the idea that a state can be run from below is utopian -- it is not designed for that and no state has ever been). Sadly for his argument, both Lenin and Trotsky argued against the idea of workers' democracy and, in stark contrast, argued that the dictatorship of the party was essential for a successful revolution. Indeed, they both explicitly argued against the idea that a mass, democratic organisation could run society during a revolution. The need for party power was raised explicitly to combat the fact that the workers' could change their minds and vote against the vanguard party. As such, the founding fathers of the SWP/ISO political tradition explicitly argued that a workers' state had to reject workers' power and democracy in order to ensure the victory of the revolution. Clearly, according to McNally's own argument, Bolshevism cannot be considered as "socialism from below" as it explicitly argued that a workers' state did not "necessarily" mean workers' power or democracy.

As indicated above, for the period McNally **himself** selects (the 1920s and 1930s), Trotsky consistently argued that the Bolshevik tradition the SWP/ISO places itself was based on the "principle" of party dictatorship. For McNally to talk about Trotsky keeping "*socialism from below*" alive is, therefore, truly amazing. It either indicates a lack of awareness of Trotsky's ideas or a desire to deceive.

For anarchists, we stress, the Bolshevik substitution of party power for workers' power did not come as a surprise. The state is the delegation of **power**-- as such, it means that the idea of a "workers' state" expressing "workers' power" is a logical impossibility. If workers **are** running society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, **not** in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design.

For this reason anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the agent of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished. If these organs of workers' self-management are co-opted into a state structure (as happened in Russia) then their power will be handed over to the **real** power in any state -- the government (in this case, the Council of People's Commissars). They will quickly become mere rubberstamps of the organisation which holds the reigns of power, the vanguard party and its central committee.

McNally rewrites history by arguing that it was "*Stalin's counter-revolution*" which saw "*communist militants . . . executed, peasants slaughtered, the last vestiges of democracy eliminated.*" The SWP/ISO usually date this "counter-revolution" to around 1927/8. However, by this date there was no "*vestiges*" of meaningful democracy left -- as Trotsky himself made clear in his comments in favour of party dictatorship in 1921 and 1923. Indeed, Trotsky had supported the repression of the Kronstadt revolt which had called for soviet democracy (see the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)" for details). He argues that Trotsky "*acknowledged that the soviets had been destroyed, that union democracy had disappeared, that the Bolshevik party had been stripped of its revolutionary character*" under Stalinism. Yet, as we noted in [section 8](#), the Bolsheviks had already destroyed soviet democracy, undermined union democracy and repressed all revolutionary elements outside of the party (the anarchists being first in April 1918). Moreover, as we discussed in [section 13](#), Lenin had argued for the introduction of state capitalism in April 1918 and the appointment of "one-man management." Clearly, by the start of the Russian Civil War in late May 1918, the Bolsheviks had introduced much of which McNally denounces as "Stalinism." By 1921, the repression of the Kronstadt revolt and the major strike wave that inspired it had made Stalinism inevitable (see the appendix on "[What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?](#)"). Clearly, to draw a sharp distinction between Stalinism and Bolshevism under Lenin is difficult, if not impossible, to make based on McNally's own criteria.

During his analysis of the Trotskyist movements, McNally states that after the second world war "*the Trotskyist movement greeted*" the various new Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere "*as workers' states*" in spite of being "*brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyrannies.*" Given that the SWP/ISO and a host of other Leninist groups still argue that Lenin's brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyranny was some kind of "workers' state" McNally's comments seem deeply ironic given the history of Leninism in power. As such, Trotsky's defence of Stalinism as a "*degenerated workers' state*" is not as surprising as McNally tries to claim. If, as he argues, "*[t]o talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy*" then Lenin's regime had ceased to be a "workers' state" (if such a thing could exist) by the spring of 1918 at the latest. For anarchists (and libertarian Marxists) the similarities are all too clear between the regime under Lenin and that under Stalin. That McNally cannot see the obvious similarities suggests a lack of objectivity.

He sums up his account of the post-Second War World Trotskyists by arguing that "the movement Trotsky had created fell victim to the ideology of socialism from above." Unfortunately for his claims, this is not the case. As proven above, Trotsky had consistently argued for the dictatorship of the party for 20 years and so Trotskyism had always been based on "*the ideology of socialism from above.*" Trotsky had argued for party dictatorship simply because democratic mass organisations would allow the working class to express their "*wavering*" and

"vacillations." Given that, according to those who follow Bolshevik ideas, the working class is meant to run the so-called "workers' state" Trotsky's arguments are extremely significant. He explicitly acknowledged that under Bolshevism the working class does **not** actually manage their own fates but rather the vanguard party does. This is cannot be anything **but** "*socialism from above.*" If, as McNally argues, Trotsky's "*fatal error*" in not recognising that Stalinism was state capitalism came from "*violating the principles of socialism from below,*" then this "fatal error" is at the heart of the Leninist tradition.

As such, its roots can be traced further back than the rise of Stalin. Its real roots lie with the idea of a "workers' state" and so with the ideas of Marx and Engels. As Bakunin argued at the time (and anarchists have repeated since) the state is, by its nature, a centralised and top-down machine. By creating a "revolutionary" government, power is automatically transferred from the working class into the hands of a few people at the top. As they have the real, **de facto**, power in the state, it is inevitable that they will implement "socialism from above" as that is how the state is structured. As Bakunin argued, "*every state . . . are in essence only machines governing the masses from above*" by a "*privileged minority, allegedly knowing the genuine interests of the people better than the people themselves.*" The idea of a state being run "from below" makes as much sense as "dry rain." Little wonder Bakunin argued for a "*federal organisation, from the bottom upward, of workers' associations, groups, city and village communes, and finally of regions and peoples*" as "*the sole condition of a real and not fictitious liberty.*" In other words, "*[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 211, p. 210 and p. 223] Only this, the destruction of every state and its replacement by a system of workers' councils, can ensure a real "**socialism from below.**"

Therefore, rather than signifying the working class running society directly, the "workers' state" actually signifies the opposite -- namely, that the working class has delegated that power and responsibility to **others**, namely the government. As Leninism supports the idea of a "workers' state" then it is inevitably and logically tied to the idea of "socialism from below." Given that Lenin himself argued that "only from below" was an anarchist principle (see [last section](#)), we can easily see what the "fatal error" of Trotsky **actually** was. By rejecting anarchism he automatically rejected **real "socialism from below."**

Sadly for McNally, Trotsky did not, as he asserts, embrace the "*democratic essence*" of socialism in the 1920s or 30s. Rather, as is clear from Trotsky's writings, he embraced party dictatorship (i.e. "*socialism from above*") and considered this as quite compatible (indeed, an essential aspect) of his Leninist ideology. That McNally fails to indicate this and, indeed, asserts the exact opposite of the facts shows that it is not only anarchism he is ignorant about.