

# **NOTES ABOUT SOVIETS, EMPOWERMENT AND STATE**

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## **THE PATHS OF “PROLETARIAN” POWER**

It is a long time now since the avant-garde socialist intelligentsia framed, in more or less rounded form, the aims of the historical struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and since proletarians, swallowing that formulation by the intelligentsia whole, entered the lists of that struggle under the intelligentsia's leadership. There is no denying that this was a triumph for the intelligentsia which has thus set itself the target of leading the proletariat on to complete emancipation, by means of the destruction of bourgeois power and the bourgeois State, which are to be supplanted by a “proletarian” State and power.

Very naturally, neither the intelligentsia nor the proletariat itself has been stinting in its efforts and investigations designed to expose to the widest possible audience all the harm done by the bourgeois State. Thanks to which, they have been able to nurse and develop among the toiling masses the notion of a “proletarian” power that would supposedly resolve all their problems. According to this view, the proletariat, through its class power and State, would make use of the only existing means whereby it and other classes might free themselves of the bourgeoisie and introduce the principles of freedom and egalitarianism into the relations between people. Such a forecast of the destiny of “proletarian” power has always struck us anarchists as a crass error. In times gone by, our comrades constantly revolted against this notion and also demonstrated where the statist had gone wrong in differentiating between “proletarian” power and the State in general and in ascribing to the former a mission that was profoundly alien to it.

Statist socialists, however, remained true to their authoritarian tradition and it was armed with that outlook that they seized upon the Great Russian Revolution, a revolution of a depth and breadth in social implications for which History had seen no equal. As for us anarchists, we opposed their mistaken forecast about the destiny of “proletarian” power. In the course of the polemic between us, we showed the statist that any State, whether bourgeois or proletarian, tends, by its very nature, simply to

exploit and oppress man, to destroy in each and every one of us all the natural qualities of the human spirit that strive for equality and for the solidarity that underpins it. Which earned us only greater hatred from the statist socialists. Now, the existence and practice of “proletarian” power in Russia have borne out and bear out the accuracy of our analysis. The “proletarian” State has increasingly betrayed its true nature and proved that its proletarianess was a mere figment, as proletarians have been able to appreciate since the early years of the revolution, the more so since they themselves helped install it. The fact that in the course of its degeneration the “proletarian” power has showed itself to be nothing more than a State power pure and simple is now beyond dispute and has induced it to desist from artful concealment of its real face. Its practice had abundantly proved that its goals and those of the Great Russian Revolution had absolutely nothing in common.

Over all those years of hypocrisy, it has failed to subordinate the aims of the Russian Revolution to its own ends peaceably, and has had to confront all who threatened to expose its true essence - as a huge and festering ulcer upon the body of the revolution - the cowardice and treachery of which spell death and ruination to all without exception, and primarily to those who try to be independent and operate freely. One might ask oneself: how did all of this come to pass? According to Marx and Lenin, “proletarian” power ought not to bear any resemblance at all to bourgeois power. Does not some segment of the vanguard of the proletariat bear a share of the blame for this state of affairs?

Many anarchists tend to reckon that the proletariat counts for nothing in this, having been, so to speak, duped by the caste of socialist intellectuals, who supposedly aspire, over a series of purely socio historical phenomena and by reason of the logic of inevitable amendments to the State, to replace the power of the bourgeoisie with their own power. It is supposedly on these grounds that the socialist intelligentsia would seek, on a permanent basis, to direct the struggle of the proletariat against the capitalist, bourgeois world. As I see it, such an argument is neither quite accurate nor is it really adequate. Russia’s revolutionary experience supplies us with objective data galore in this connection. It shows us beyond rebuttal that the proletariat was not at all homogeneous during the revolution. Thus, the urban proletariat, whenever it participated in the overthrow of the power of thou! Class enemy - the bourgeoisie - in many towns, hesitated for a moment between the paths of the revolutions of February

and October 1917. It was only after a time, after October's military victory over February, that a significant fraction of the urban proletariat began to throw in its lot with the part of its brothers, the direct architects of the gains of October. Soon, that segment of the proletariat not only forgot to defend those gains for itself, but also was in more of a hurry to go over to the Bolshevik party on power, which was cute enough to flatter it immoderately, cultivating in it a certain taste for class privileges, political, economic and juridical. Drinking deeply of these class privileges, this segment of the proletariat fell equally in love with its "proletarian class State." Self-evidently, the Bolshevik social democratic party wholly supported and encouraged it in this trend, for it offered the party great scope for implementation of its own program, which consisted of utilizing the practical struggle of the proletariat so as to bring the bulk of the proletariat to heel and then take over State power in its name. Along the way, the better to stand out from the crowd, the Bolshevik social democratic party turned itself into the "Bolshevik Communist" party, unashamedly resorting to the most brazen demagoguery and shrinking from no ploy, not hesitating, as the need arose, to cannibalize the programs of other political groupings: all for the sole purpose of binding the proletariat - to which it pledged its unstinting help, when in fact it was pursuing its own ends alone - all the better to itself.

In this sense, the party was the finest embodiment of the historical ambitions of the intellectual caste: supplanting the bourgeoisie in power and exercising that power, no matter the cost. A sizable segment of the proletariat failed to stand up to its views: indeed, quite the opposite, it identified with what it did and became its accomplice. That segment of the proletariat had, however, been educated over generations to the notion that the proletariat would only emancipate itself from the bourgeoisie when it managed to break its power and destroy its state organization in order to clear the way for the construction of its own. Nevertheless, this fraction of the proletariat helped the Bolshevik-Communist party to organize its "proletarian power" and erect "its" class State.

The path taken and the means employed did not take long to assimilate that fraction of the proletariat in every particular to the overthrown bourgeoisie, rendering it every whit as impudent and arrogant, with no scruples about using the most savage violence to enforce its domination over the people and the revolution. It goes without saying that this violence was second nature to the party's intellectual caste, for it had been schooling

itself in its use for many a long year and had become intoxicated with it. As for the bulk of the proletariat - yesterday's mute slave - the violence deployed against its fellows is wholly alien to it. Busy with the building of its "class State", part of the proletariat was thus induced to behave, through the use of violence, in a repugnant fashion with regard to the individual liberty, freedom of speech and expression of any revolutionary organization, the moment that the latter impudently took issue with "proletarian" power. That fraction of the proletariat scurried to ensconce themselves, under the leadership of the Bolshevik-Communist party, in the positions left vacant by the despots of the toppled bourgeoisie, becoming in their turn a tyrannical master-class, showing no hesitation, in pursuit of these ends, about using the ghastliest violence indiscriminately against all who opposed its designs.

At the same time, this behavior was artfully concealed behind the "defense of the revolution." Such violence was employed above all against the body of the Russian revolution, for the exclusive benefit of the narrow interests of one fraction of the proletariat and of the Bolshevik-Communist party, and on behalf of their complete domination of all the other laboring classes. This cannot be regarded simply as the proletariat blown temporarily off course. Yet again, we can see very clearly how all State power brazenly shows what it is made of, with the adjective "proletarian" changing absolutely nothing.

As I see it, it is for all these reasons that all foreign comrades who have not had this first-hand experience should carefully scrutinize all the stages of the Russian revolution, particularly the role played in it by the Bolshevik- Communist party and by that fraction of the proletariat that has followed it. This so that they may steer clear of the same errors, in the light of the shameless demagogy of the Bolsheviks and their supporters, regarding the serviceability of "proletarian" power.

It is equally true that the campaign currently being waged by all our comrades against Bolshevik lies should be deployed in support of reliable information concerning anything they might themselves put to the broad masses in replacement of this "proletarian" power. Fine slogans are not enough, although the masses are often not indifferent to them. This struggle is waged on the basis of concrete situations and continually leads to the posing of crucial and urgent questions: how and by which methods of social action should the toiling masses seek their complete emancipation?

Such questions should be answered as directly as possible and with the utmost clarity. That is a vital necessity, not only if an active struggle is to be conducted against the capitalist and bourgeois world, but also for our anarchist movement, for the influence of our ideas upon the launch and the outcome of that struggle hinges upon it. Which means that the proletariat must not repeat the mistake made by its brethren in Russia, which is to say, must not busy itself with the organizing of a “proletarian” power under the baton of any party, even should it label itself “proletarian”, but only with seeing to the satisfaction of everyone's needs and defending the revolution against all manner of State authorities.

\* Paper published by Probuзdeniye N° 18. January 1932, pp. 45-48. Cap 9 from “The struggle against the state and other essays”. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. Edited by Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996.

## **SOVIET POWER - ITS PRESENT AND ITS FUTURE**

Many people, especially left-wing politicians, have a tendency to regard “soviet” power as a State power different from all the rest, to be sure, but painting that difference in the rosiest of hues: “Soviet power”, they tell us, “is a worker and peasant power and, as such, has a great future ahead of it.”

There can be no more absurd assertion. “Soviet” power is a power no better and no worse than any other. Currently, it is every bit as wobbly and absurd as any State power in general. In certain respects, it is even more absurd than the rest. Having achieved total political domination over the country, it has become the unchallenged master of its economic resources and, not content with that crassly exploitative situation, it has sensed, welling up from within itself, the deceptive sentiment of a spiritual “perfection”, a sentiment that it seeks to peddle to the country's toiling revolutionary people. This has left its proletarian “spirit” less revolutionary, but more impudent. Thus, it seeks to foist itself upon the bamboozled populace as its spiritual master: in this, it is faithful to the boundless and irresponsible effrontery of every State power. It is an open secret that this supposed “perfection” of the regime is merely the perfection of its mentor, the Bolshevik-Communist party. All of which is nothing more than a barefaced lie, abject

duplicity and criminal impudence towards the toiling masses, in whose name and thanks to whom the great Russian revolution, currently flayed by the authorities to the benefit of their party privileges and those of the proletarian minority which, under the party's sway, believed it could identify with the labels of "proletarian" State and the dictatorship of the "proletariat", so seductive to those who know no better, was carried out. A minority that nonetheless lets itself be dragged along by the bridle by that party, in silence, without having any say in the matter, bereft of the right to be briefed in detail about what was treacherously concocted and accomplished yesterday, and what is still being cooked up today against its proletarian brethren, the ones that refuse to be a blind, unspeaking cat's paw and who do not swallow the lies of the party that wears a proletarian disguise. In spite of everything, one might wonder if such conduct by the Bolshevik authorities with regard to the toilers may show itself differently in the realm of their "spiritual" education. It strikes me that that cannot but be the case. As evidence of that I would cite the persistence of revolutionary consciousness in the toilers of the USSR, a source of grave disquiet to the regime, and the fact that the Bolshevik party seeks to replace it with a political consciousness manufactured after the pattern of its program. This is the factor that explains why Bolshevik authorities are facing more and more difficulties and why they stupidly seek to round off their economic and political despotism with a spiritual grip upon the laboring people. It goes without saying that the regime's current straits closely determine its future prospects: a future that is fraught with uncertainty, for want of a plainly favorable present. In fact, the present position is so visibly unfavorable for millions of workers that we may expect, any year now, bloody insurrections and revolutions erupting against the Bolshevik-Communist order. It is very obvious that the insurrectionist and revolutionary spirit of the USSR's workers should enjoy the support of any and every revolutionary.

However, counter-revolutionaries and the enemies of the toilers must not make capital out of that support. Consequently, that support should have no aim other than the destruction of the present senseless and irresponsible order, set up for the benefit of the privileges of party members and their hirelings. The lunacy of this regime must be eliminated and replaced by the vital principles of the exploited workers, on a basis of solidarity, freedom and equal voice for each and every person, in short, for all concerned with genuine emancipation. This is a matter that concerns all Russian revolutionaries: all who find themselves exiles or inside the USSR must, as I see it,

concern themselves with it first of all: as well as all proletarians and intellectuals of revolutionary disposition: to whom I would add all opponents of, and political fugitives from the Bolshevik regime, provided that it be for truly revolutionary considerations.

That is how I see the present and the future of “soviet power” as well as the stance that Russian revolutionaries of all persuasions must adopt with regard to it. In my view, revolutionaries cannot pose the problem differently. They must appreciate that, if Bolshevik power is to be fought, one has to be able to boast in the greatest measure the values that it used and enunciated in order to seize power: values that it still professes, moreover, to champion, albeit without sincerity. Otherwise, the struggle of revolutionaries would turn out to be, if not counter-revolutionary, then at least of no use to the cause of millions of toilers gulled, oppressed and exploited by the Bolshevik-Communists, toilers that a revolutionary should be helping, whatever the cost, to break free of the vicious circle of falsehood and oppression.

\* Paper published by *Bor'ba* (The Struggle) Paris, N° 19-20, 25 October 1931, pp.2-3. This paper was published by a number of anti-Stalinist and anti-Trotskyist Soviet defectors, who distanced themselves from the Bolshevik regime on a basis of reversion to the power of the free soviets of 1917 and the demands of the Kronstadt rebels of 1921. The leading light behind the magazine was Gregory Bessedovsky, a Ukrainian former soviet diplomat who quit the USSR's Paris embassy sensationally and devoted himself to violent denunciation of the corruption of the Stalinist regime. See his book “*Qui, J'accuse!*”, Paris, 1930.

## **THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE STATE**

The fact that the modern State is the organizational form of an authority founded upon arbitrariness and violence in the social life of toilers is independent of whether it may be “bourgeois” or “proletarian.” It relies upon oppressive centralism, arising out of the direct violence of a minority deployed against the majority. In order to enforce and impose the legality of its system, the State resorts not only to the gun and money, but also to potent weapons of psychological pressure. With the aid of such weapons, a tiny group of politicians enforces psychological repression of an entire society, and, in

particular, of the toiling masses, conditioning them in such a way as to divert their attention from the slavery instituted by the State. So it must be clear that if we are to combat the organized violence of the modern State, we have to deploy powerful weapons, appropriate to the magnitude of the task. Thus far, the methods of social action employed by the revolutionary working class against the power of the oppressors and exploiters - the State and Capital - in conformity with libertarian ideas, were insufficient to lead the toilers on to complete victory.

It has come to pass in History that the workers have defeated Capital, but the victory then slipped from their grasp, because some State power emerged, amalgamating the interests of private capital and those of State capitalism for the sake of success over the toilers. The experience of the Russian revolution has blatantly exposed our shortcomings in this regard. We must not forget that, but should rather apply ourselves to identifying those shortcomings plainly. We may acknowledge that our struggle against the State in the Russian revolution was remarkable, despite the disorganization by which our ranks were afflicted: remarkable above all insofar as the destruction of that odious institution is concerned.

But, by contrast, our struggle was insignificant in the realm of construction of the free society of toilers and its social structures, which might have ensured that it prospered beyond reach of the tutelage of the State and its repressive institutions. The fact that we libertarian communists or anarchosyndicalists failed to anticipate the sequel to the Russian revolution and that we failed to make haste to devise new forms of social activity in time, led many of our groups and organizations to dither yet again in their political and socio strategic policy on the fighting front of the Revolution. If we are to avert a future relapse into these same errors, when a revolutionary situation comes about, and in order to retain the cohesion and coherence of our organizational line, we must first of all amalgamate all of our forces into one active collective, then without further ado, define our constructive conception of economic, social, local and territorial units, so that they are outlined in detail (free soviets), and in particular describe in broad outline their basic revolutionary mission in the struggle against the State.

Contemporary life and the Russian revolution require that. Those who have blended in with the very ranks of the worker and peasant masses, participating actively in the victories and defeats of their campaign, must without doubt come to our own conclusions, and more specifically to an appreciation that our struggle against the State



must be carried on until the State has been utterly eradicated: they will also acknowledge that the toughest role in that struggle is the role of the revolutionary armed force. It is essential that the action of the Revolution's armed forces be linked with the social and economic unit, wherein the laboring people will organize itself from the earliest days of the revolution onwards, so that total self-organization of life' may be introduced, out of reach of all statist structures.

From this moment forth, anarchists must focus their attention upon that aspect of the Revolution. They have to be convinced that, if the revolution's armed forces are organized into huge armies or into lots of local armed detachments, they cannot but overcome the State's incumbents and defenders, and thereby bring about the conditions needed by the toiling populace supporting the revolution, so that it may cut all ties with the past and look to the final detail of the process of constructing a new socioeconomic existence. The State will, though, be able to cling to a few local enclaves and try to place multifarious obstacles in the path of the toilers' new life, slowing the pace of growth and harmonious development of new relationships founded on the complete emancipation of man.

The final and utter liquidation of the State can only come to pass when the struggle of the toilers is oriented along the most libertarian lines possible, when the toilers will themselves determine the structures of their social action. These structures should assume the form of organs of social and economic self-direction, the form of free "antiauthoritarian" soviets. The revolutionary workers and their vanguard -- the anarchists - must analyze the nature and structure of these soviets and specify their revolutionary functions in advance. It is upon that, chiefly, that the positive evolution and development of anarchist ideas in the ranks of those who will accomplish the liquidation of the State on their own account in order to build a free society, will be dependent.

\* Paper published by *Dielo Truda* № 17. The struggle against the state and other essays. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. October 1926, pp. 5-6. Edited by Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996.

## **THE FIRST OF MAY: SYMBOL OF A NEW ERA IN THE LIFE AND STRUGGLE OF THE TOILERS**

In the socialist world, the first of May is considered the Labor holiday. This is a mistaken description that has so penetrated the lives of the toilers that in many countries that day is indeed celebrated as such. In fact, the first of May is not at all a holiday for the toilers. No, the toilers should not stay in their workshops or in the fields on that date. On that date, toilers all over the world should come together in every village, every town, and organize mass rallies, not to mark that date as statist socialists and especially the Bolsheviki conceive it, but rather to gauge the measure of their strength and assess the possibilities for direct armed struggle against a rotten, cowardly, slaveholding order rooted in violence and falsehood. It is easiest for all the toilers to come together on that historic date, already part of the calendar, and most convenient for them to express their collective will, as well as enter into common discussion of everything related to essential matters of the present and the future.

Over forty years ago, the American workers of Chicago and its environs assembled on the first of May. There they listened to addresses from many socialist orators, and more especially those from anarchist orators, for they fairly gobbled up libertarian ideas and openly sided with the anarchists. That day those American workers attempted, by organizing themselves, to give expression to their protest against the iniquitous order of the State and Capital of the propertied. That was what the American libertarians Spies, Parsons and others spoke about. It was at this point that this protest rally was interrupted by provocations by the hirelings of Capital and it ended with the massacre of unarmed workers, followed by the arrest and murder of Spies, Parsons and other comrades.

The workers of Chicago and district had not assembled to celebrate the May Day holiday. They had gathered to resolve, in common, the problems of their lives and their struggles. Today too, where so ever the toilers have freed themselves from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie and the social democracy linked to it (Menshevik or Bolshevik, it makes no difference) or even try to do so, they regard the first of May as the occasion of a get-together when they will concern themselves with their own affairs and consider the matter of their emancipation. Through these aspirations, they give expression to their solidarity with and regard for the memory of the Chicago martyrs. Thus they sense that the first of May cannot be a holiday for them. So, despite the claims of "professional socialists", tending to portray it as the Feast of Labor, the first of May can

be nothing of the sort for conscious workers. The first of May is the symbol of a new era in the life and struggle of the toilers, an era that each year offers the toilers fresh, increasingly tough and decisive battles against the bourgeoisie, for the freedom and independence wrested from them, for their social ideal.

\* Paper published by Dielo Truda N° 36. The struggle against the state and other essays. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. 1928, pp. 2-3. Edited by Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996. British Library.

## **ANARCHISM AND OUR TIMES**

Anarchism is not merely a doctrine that treats of man's social life, in the narrow meaning with which the term is invested in political dictionaries, and sometimes, at meetings, by our propagandist speakers. It is also a teaching that embraces the whole existence of man as a rounded individual. Over the course of the elaboration of its overall world picture, anarchism has set itself a very specific task: to encompass the world in its entirety, sweeping aside all manner of obstacles, present and yet to come, which might be posed by bourgeois capitalist science and technology. This with the aim of supplying man with the most exhaustive possible explanation of existence in this world and of making the best possible fist of all the problems which may confront it: this approach should help it to internalize a consciousness of the anarchism naturally inherent in it that, at least, is what I suppose - to the extent that it is continually being faced with partial manifestations thereof.

It is on the basis of the will of the individual that the libertarian teaching can be embodied in real life and clear a path that will help man to banish all spirit of submission from his bosom. When it develops, anarchism knows no bounds. It acknowledges no banks within which it might be confined and fixed. Just like human existence, it has no definitive formulas for its aspirations and objectives. As I see it, the right that every man enjoys to total freedom, as defined by the theoretical postulates of anarchism, could only be, for him, a means through which to achieve more or less complete blossoming, whilst continuing to develop. Having banished from man that spirit of submission that has been artificially thrust upon him, anarchism thereafter

becomes the keynote idea of human society on its march towards the attainment of all its goals.

In our times, anarchism is still regarded as theoretically weak: furthermore, some argue that it is often interpreted wrongly. However, its exponents have plenty to say about it: many are constantly prattling about it, militating actively and sometimes complaining of its lack of success.<sup>1</sup> Each and every one of us is agreed that cohesion between all active anarchists, in the form of a serious collective activity, is what is needed. It would, therefore, be very surprising for opponents of that Union in our ranks to declare themselves. The issue to be resolved relates only to the organizational format that such a Union of anarchists might assume. Personally, I am inclined to accept as the most appropriate and most necessary organizational format the one that would offer itself as a Union of anarchists constructed on the basis of the principles of collective discipline and concerted direction of all anarchist forces. Thus, all organizations affiliating to it would be inter-connected not just by a community of socio-revolutionary goals, but also by a common subscription to the means that would lead us there.

The activities of local organizations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions: however, such activities must, unfailingly, be consonant with the pattern of the overall organizational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country. Whether this Union describes itself as a party or as something else is a matter of merely secondary importance. The essential point is that it should focus all anarchist forces upon uniform and common practice against the enemy, pressing ahead with the struggle for toilers' rights, implementation of the social revolution and the installation of the anarchist society!

\* Paper published by *Dielo Truda* N° 6. The struggle against the state and other essays. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. November 1925, pp. 6-7. Edited by Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996. British Library.

\* All the 5 papers are part of “The struggle against the state and other essays”. MAKHNO, Nestor Ivanovich. Edited by Alexander Skirda. Ak Press, 1996. This

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<sup>1</sup> I imagine, in this last instance, that this attitude is prompted by the failure to devise, through research, the social wherewithal vital to anarchism if it is to gain a foothold in contemporary society.

material was compiled and reviewed by Pablo Mizraji, for the 100 Years of the Russian Revolution Dossier, published by ITHA, 2017.