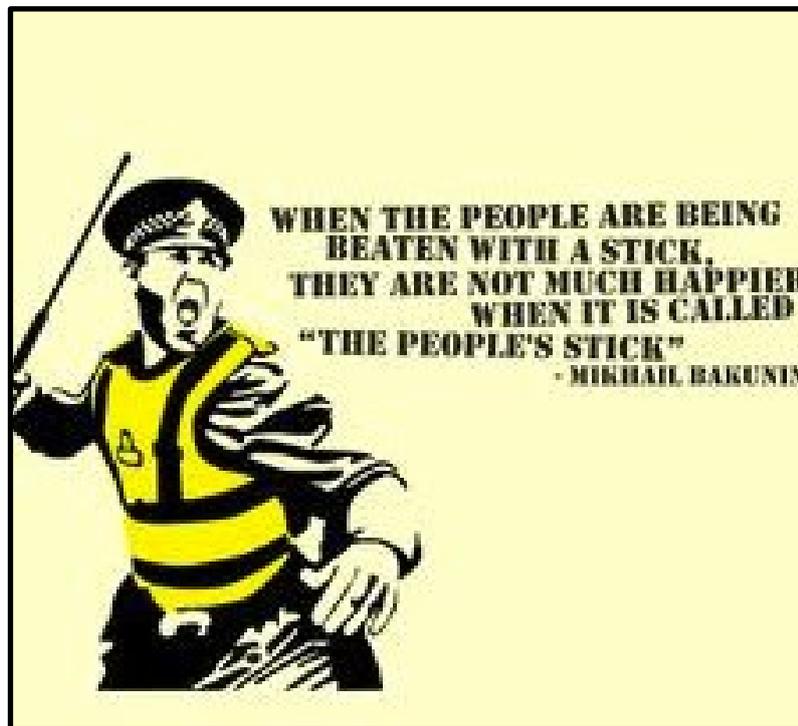


## ANARCHISM & ITS RIVALRY PART 2:

# WHY ANARCHISTS OPPOSE MARXISM, THE SACP, TROTSKYISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY



## ANARCHIST POLITICAL SCHOOL



# **Anarchism and Strategy: why Anarchists Reject Marxism and the SACP, Trotskyism and Social Democracy**

## **1. Rivals to anarchism in the working class and poor**

Last month we discussed how people suffering from oppression and domination have always organised to fight for better daily conditions of work and life for themselves and their communities. But we also said that in doing so, they have adopted a variety of different ideas to guide their struggle.

Nationalism (discussed last time) is just one of those sets of ideas; its aim is to unite all the members of a nation, regardless of class, for their own national government (e.g. against colonial rule, for an Afrikaner “volkstaat”, for a “New South Africa” etc). The ANC, PAC, NP and the black consciousness movement are examples of movements based on nationalism.

In this session we are going to look at 3 different sets of ideas whose aim is the **abolition of the system of capitalism**: two versions of **Marxism** (mainstream Marxism (SACP) and Trotskyism), as well as **social democracy**.

Anarchism is also one of those sets of ideas that has had influence amongst people and movements struggling against oppression in history. But *only anarchism has shown an ability to fundamentally free the working class*. That is why we must fight the battle of ideas to ensure that anarchism becomes the leading idea of the working class and poor.

## **2. Marxism**

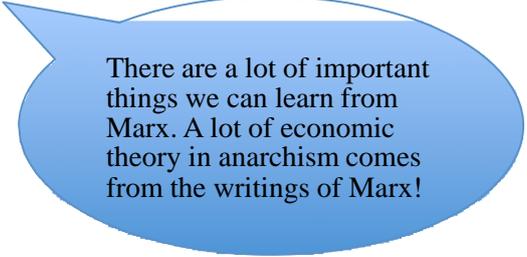
Marxism is one of the most important rivals to anarchism because it is currently the most influential idea within the left in South Africa, and even internationally. It is the official ideology of the SACP and Cosatu, and it is embraced in various forms by the majority of social movements and other political organisations – even if in many cases ordinary workers and the poor are not fully aware of what Marxism is actually all about. Although Marxism from the late 1910s came to enjoy a lot of legitimacy because it was associated with real and living “socialism” in the Soviet Union, it wasn't always the most influential ideology. Anarchism was by far the most influential left ideology for much of the 1800s and early 1900s.

### **2.1 What is “Marxism”?**

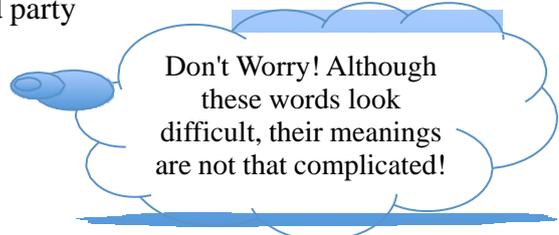
Marxism is an ideology based on the ideas and writings of Karl Marx (and also Friedrich Engels, Marx's close friend). Marx was an important German philosopher who spent most of his life (between 1818 – 1883) in a library writing about his ideas on politics and the economy. But Marx didn't see his ideas as a opinion – he saw his theory as *scientifically* true. He believed that he had discovered the “laws” governing society, in the same way that Issac Newton discovered the laws governing gravity. Because of this, a lot of Marx's work was based on trying to analyse history and to understand how the world changes over time.

In this module we are going to concentrate on the following aspects of Marxism:

- Exploitation and class society
- Historical materialism and economic determinism
- Means/mode/forces and relations of production
- Stages of history
- Theory of Revolution and the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”
- Trade unions, social movements and the vanguard party
- Problems with Marxism
- Versions of Marxism: SACP, Trotskyism



There are a lot of important things we can learn from Marx. A lot of economic theory in anarchism comes from the writings of Marx!

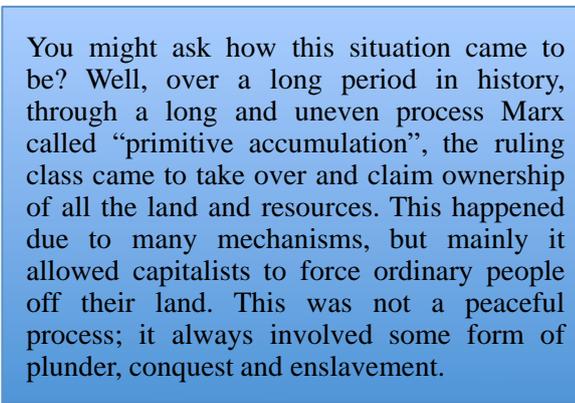


Don't Worry! Although these words look difficult, their meanings are not that complicated!

## 2.2. Exploitation and class

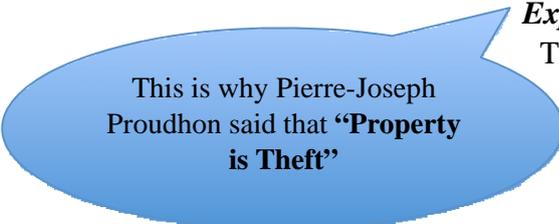
By this stage you probably already know what exploitation is. The theory of exploitation is one of the most important aspects of Marxism, and a theory that anarchists accept.

Recall that we discussed how the world is divided into 2 main classes - the working class (or “proletariat”) and the ruling class (or “bourgeoisie”/ “capitalists”). For Marxists, class is defined by *ownership*: the capitalists own all the land, all the factories and all the farms while the proletariat owns nothing. All the ordinary working class person has if he/she wants to put food on the table, is his/her ability to work for a wage. And so, in this way, the proletariat must sell its labour to the capitalists (who usually do no work at all) in return for a wage. The capitalists, although they don't even work, earn much more than the workers – because they get profit.



You might ask how this situation came to be? Well, over a long period in history, through a long and uneven process Marx called “primitive accumulation”, the ruling class came to take over and claim ownership of all the land and resources. This happened due to many mechanisms, but mainly it allowed capitalists to force ordinary people off their land. This was not a peaceful process; it always involved some form of plunder, conquest and enslavement.

But where does the profit come from? It comes from work of the workers. When workers get paid a wage, that wage is less than the real value of their work is. So basically profit is what is skimmed off the top of the wages, or stolen from the workers by the capitalists. All because their resources and land were stolen from them in the first place!



This is why Pierre-Joseph Proudhon said that “**Property is Theft**”

**Exploitation is the word describing this double robbery:**

The ruling class lives like parasites, by exploiting the working class



## 2.4. Means, mode, forces and relations of production

Marx developed 4 concepts that we need to understand:

- **Means of production** = resources e.g. land, factories, farms, machinery
- **Forces of production** = resources *plus* labour (as another resource)
- **Relations of production** = How the production process is organised in society (class relations)
- **Mode of production** = an economic and political system which has its own specific *relations of production*.

Do these terms sound familiar?

So, to give just one example:

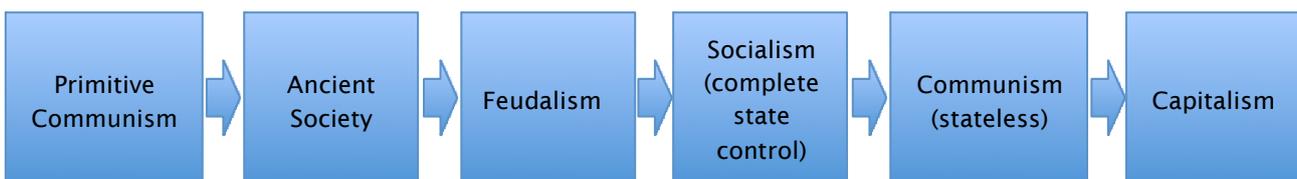
**Capitalism** is one *mode of production*. Under capitalism, the *relations of production* are based on **private ownership** of the *means of production*, the existence of a **market** where goods exchanged, and production for **profit** and **accumulation** of wealth. The *forces of production* combine these privately owned resources with **waged labour**.

Note: there have been other *modes of production* which have different *relations of production*. Marx identified, for example, the “feudal” mode of production (based on feudal lords and serfs) and the “Asiatic” mode of production, which he claimed existed only in Asia.

Marx and Engels did not account for some modes of production because they mainly focused on history in Europe

## 2.5. Stages of History

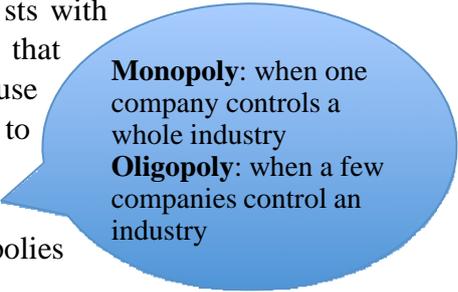
Marxists argue that history is **linear**. This means that it goes in a *straight line* from the earliest point to the latest point, and that therefore history has a *direction*, and progresses in *stages*. Technically, we call this “teleology”. According to Marxist theory, all history everywhere (with some exceptions) follows this basic pattern:



Now, the theory of *historical materialism* says that from the beginning of each stage, the *forces of production* begin to **develop and expand**. Remember, the key ingredient in the forces of production is human labour. At some point, because of their expansion, these forces begin to become counter-productive; they begin to come into conflict with the *relations of production* (or class relations). This process produces massive **class struggle** and **crisis**. When class struggle and crisis become too great, the entire *mode of production* is overthrown, and a new mode comes into being. And the process starts again...

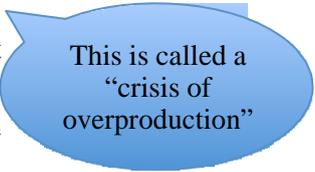
To put this in simpler terms let's take the **capitalist mode** as an example:

At the beginning of capitalism, there were many small capitalists with small companies, all employing some workers. When we said that the **forces of production expand**, here we mean that because capitalists were forced to compete, some of them were forced to close, and others were absorbed into bigger and stronger companies. Eventually, capitalism developed so much, that many companies came to be huge monopolies and oligopolies employing tens or hundreds of thousands of workers.



**Monopoly:** when one company controls a whole industry  
**Oligopoly:** when a few companies control an industry

When we say that the **forces of production expand**, under capitalism we are ultimately saying that big changes occur within industry, and within the working class. For example, the development of capitalism meant that millions of workers were brought side by side with millions of other workers - all doing the same horrible work. And, because of this competition between capitalists, wages decrease so much (in the pursuit of profit) that workers can't even buy the goods that they themselves produce. This leads to massive economic crises because capitalists are not able to sell all the goods being produced.

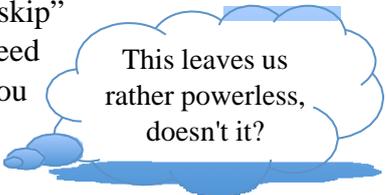


This is called a "crisis of overproduction"

When we say that the **forces of production come into conflict with the relations of production**, we are saying the existence of huge numbers of workers grouped together in massive industries (forces of production), brings about a situation in which workers start to challenge the *class structure (relations of production)* of capitalism, and therefore capitalism itself. They do this by forming trade unions and socialist political parties that can challenge and eventually even overthrow capitalism.

This is why Marxists talk about the "contradictions" in the relations of production. What they mean is that each mode of production actually contains weaknesses that will ultimately bring it down. In this case, the development of capitalism results in the formation of trade unions and political parties on the one hand, coupled with huge economic crises on the other. So, when you hear the phrase that "capitalism creates its own gravediggers", you will know what it means!

This is why, according to mainstream Marxism, it is not possible to "skip" stages. You need feudalism before you can have capitalism, and you need capitalism before you can have socialism, you need socialism before you can have communism – this is because the previous stage creates the basis for the next. Therefore, according to Marxists, socialism is not something that we can bring about because we **want** it; but rather an *inevitable* fact of life!



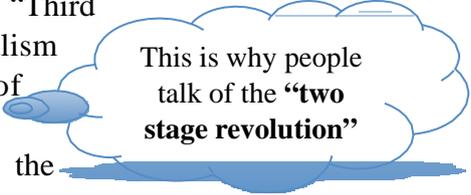
This leaves us rather powerless, doesn't it?

Discussion point:

Marxists argued that slavery and colonialism were "**progressive**". Can you explain why?


At this point it is important to acknowledge the minor differences in the theories of Marx and Engels to other Marxist theories that came afterwards. For example, Lenin (the leader of the Soviet Union from 1922-1924) made some important changes to the way that we understand colonialism.

Where Marx and Engels argued that colonialism was *good*, because it brought stagnating “backwards” societies into the march of history, Lenin argued the opposite. According to Lenin (and other “Marxist-Leninists”), colonialism was actually *bad*. He said that in its “death throes”, capitalism had tried to preserve itself by reaching out into the “Third World” through colonialism, and therefore that imperialism (colonialism) was *holding back* the development of the forces of production. Lenin’s argument was therefore that colonialism was not progressive, and that the first task of the workers was to get rid of colonialism.



This is why people talk of the “**two stage revolution**”

For the mainstream Marxist currents throughout history this is to be done by creating a “national democratic revolution” (NDR) – although they don’t always use this term. This is a *capitalist political revolution* that would allow capitalism to develop unrestrained until it digs its own grave. This means that there must be *two stages*: one capitalist stage against colonialism, and only then is socialism possible.

We must note that Marxists have differed about *who* should be responsible for carrying out the “national democratic revolution”, and how fast this should happen. Some Marxists say that it should be a *nationalist* party (like the ANC), and others say it should be the “*vanguard party*”, or the “*mass workers’ party*”. Some say that there are two distinct phases, and others claim that the anti-imperialist capitalist phase should be “sped up” and somehow “linked” to the socialist phase. Although different groups of Marxists say that they differ widely on this issue (for example Trotskyists claim to oppose the NDR approach), in fact all Marxists believe in teleology, and all believe that anti-imperialist capitalist development is necessary *before* socialism can be achieved.

## 2.5. Theory of Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

“Revolutions” happen in the process of the transition from one mode of production to another. “Revolution” really means a big change in the way that society is organised. There have been revolutions in the past (since we have already moved through various stages). For example, we can say that in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, a revolution occurred because the feudal lords and serfs were replaced by the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

However, all previous modes of production since “primitive communism” have been class systems – where one class lives off the work of another. Therefore these revolutions have only been *political revolutions* – because they only changed the ruling class, and did not actually change the basic class system (we still have a ruling class and a working class).

The big difference for Marxists in the transition from capitalism to socialism, is that the basic class relations are supposedly abolished. This is why Marxists often say that it is the great duty, or “historical mission”, of the workers in capitalist industry to make a revolution: by seizing state power and setting up the “dictatorship of the proletariat” or “workers state”. This new state, which comes to power through the revolution, will not be the agent of capitalists but rather the agent of workers!

After the revolution, the workers government will get rid of all the capitalists by *nationalising* all the industry - or putting the whole economy under the control of the state. Basically, this means that instead of being run by private capitalists, all the companies and industries will be run by the government (like Eskom). Marxists believe that this will get rid of exploitation, and therefore get rid of the class system because workers, through “their” state, will be paid the full value of their labour.

Writing Exercise

**What could be the problems with an economy run entirely by the state?**


## 2.6. Trade Unions, Social Movements and the “Vanguard” Party

We said before that for the Marxists, the ultimate objective is to seize state power and to set up a workers state, or “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Although Marxists *claim* that the proletariat is the only class capable of achieving socialism, they do not actually believe that the mass of workers and poor (organised into trade unions), or the poor (in the social movements) is actually *capable* of doing this themselves; that is, Marxists think the organisations of the workers and poor are *unable* to be revolutionary.

In fact, Marx called the unemployed, the self-employed and other petty traders etc., the “lumpen proletariat”. He said that the peasants and lumpens were not revolutionary, even “reactionary”, forces that might undermine the revolution!

Marxists argue that there are many reasons for this:

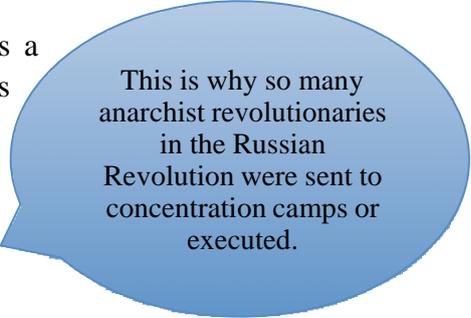
- Workers and poor sell out and get misled easily
- Trade unions are stuck in the capitalist system – they only negotiate terms of exploitation and don't really challenge exploitation itself, i.e. they are reformist
- Trade unions are based in different sectors of the economy, and they can't overcome divisions between say, miners and autoworkers
- That the existence of trade unions relies on the existence of capitalism, and that therefore trade unions will not want to abolish capitalism
- That because of these factors – workers can only develop reformist ideas, or “trade union consciousness”

“The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation etc.”

Lenin, VI. [1902] 1961, “What is to Be Done? Burning questions of our movement” in Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, Volume 1. p. 17-18

Because of these factors, Marxists say that only the *revolutionary political party* can take power *in the name of the workers*. This relates to their view that revolutionary ideas do not come out of struggle; they were “discovered” and developed by the middle class intelligentsia and were brought to workers from *outside* the workers movement – by the “revolutionary vanguard” armed with scientific theory. The revolutionary party (made up of this “intelligentsia” and an “advanced” section of the working class that are able to comprehend these “scientific”, or Marxist, ideas) are the only force that is able to lead the revolution.

The logic of this position is very dangerous: if the party has a monopoly on political wisdom and correctness, disagreements with the line of the party must then constitute a “false” consciousness. In other words, the party knows better about what the working class wants than the working class itself. And, anyone who opposes the party must actually be “counter-revolutionary”!



This is why so many anarchist revolutionaries in the Russian Revolution were sent to concentration camps or executed.

### 3. Marxism in the South African Context

In South Africa, Marxism is mainly represented by Cosatu, and by the SACP (Cosatu's Alliance partner). There are also some other small Marxist political groups – many of these consider themselves to be Trotskyites; they identify with the theories of Leon Trotsky – another Marxist theorist and leader of the Soviet Union (see next section).

#### 3.1. The SACP

The SACP (then CPSA) was established in 1921 in South Africa. It is interesting to note that syndicalists helped to set it up. This was because many anarchists all over the world, including in South Africa, were confused by the success of the Russian Revolution. In this period many anarchists looked to Bolshevism – a form of Marxism based on the ideas of the Bolshevik party in Russia – for inspiration. In the early period, the CPSA contained a variety of ideas, including anarchism and syndicalism and Marxism.

However, since then, the CPSA, and later SACP (the same organisation reformed underground after it was banned) have come to base its ideas and programme on **Marxism**.

You might recall some things about the SACP from our discussion last month. One of the points we made then was that the SACP's politics were/are “liquidationist” where the SACP delivers all its efforts into building the ANC and ensuring that the ANC retains state power. It does this by supporting ANC campaigns, by campaigning for the ANC as opposed to itself in elections, by deploying all its own cadre into the ANC, and by committing itself to “swelling the ranks” of the ANC etc. Basically the SACP embraces nationalism, not socialism, as its immediate goal. Socialism became something put off forever into the future.

But the last session didn't explain *why* the SACP does this, even when it is obvious that it has an inferior position in the alliance, as a “junior partner” to the ANC.

As you will see below, the answer for this practice can be found in its theory: **Marxism**.

In 1928, under influence from the Soviet Union, the SACP adopted a theory called the “Native Republic Thesis”. This was essentially just a South African version of the theory developed by Lenin – that the immediate struggle was not for socialism, but rather for an anti-imperialist capitalist stage. This is called the “two-stage” theory, and the reason for it stems from the view that you cannot “skip” a stage in history.

Later, from about the late 1940s, the SACP began to see the ANC as the vehicle for completing this national democratic (capitalist) stage. Soon after, it started devoting all its energy into building the ANC, which was a very small organisation in the 1930s and 1940s. The ANC actually has the SACP to thank for its mass support.

When it got banned in 1950s, the SACP adopted a theory called “Colonialism of a Special Type” (CST). The SACP’s new theory built on the “Native Republic” thesis; it held that South Africa was operating essentially under colonial conditions – and that therefore the classic theory developed by Lenin applied. But rather than being colonised by an external country, it was *internally* colonised by the resident, permanently settled, whites.

What CST meant was that this struggle for national liberation was not waged between distinct territories, colony and coloniser, but *within* the borders of one country, between two nations, black and white. Struggling against the white “coloniser” would lay the basis for the transition to socialism – at some undefined future point in time.

CST theory formalised the role of the ANC as the *leader* in the “national democratic” struggle. In practice, it translated into displacing class struggle by racial/“national” struggle, and into unquestioning SACP support for the nationalist ANC at the head of the largest possible, cross-class, nationalist coalition.



It has been 70 years, and the SACP still claims we are in the national democratic phase, led by the ANC

#### **FOSATU 1979 – 1985**

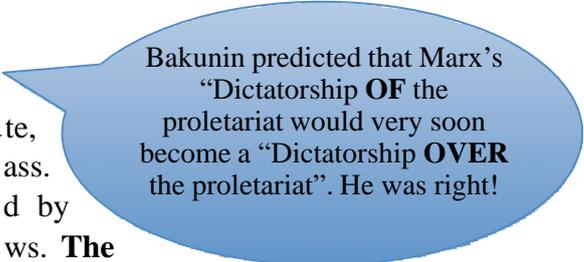
In the 1970s and 1980s there was a trade union federation called Fosatu. This Federation adamantly opposed the view that workers should have to delay their struggle for socialism to some undefined distant future. They also refused to tie themselves to the nationalist project of the ANC because they understood that the ANC could not be pro-working class. In fact, this federation took a position very close to anarchism! They argued for a working class national liberation struggle that was at the same time a struggle for socialism!

Despite their support for the ANC in practice, the SACP claims to be *the* true “vanguard” party that alone has the ability liberate the South African masses. Like with the main thrust of Marxism historically, the SACP argues that it alone can define true and scientific strategy for revolution, based on its privileged position as deliverer of “scientific” Marxist theory. This is ultimately accepted by Cosatu as well.

## 4. Why anarchists disagree with Marxists and the SACP

There are some things that anarchists and Marxists agree on. But there are important reasons why we do not accept all aspects of the Marxist analysis, and especially the Marxist political programme – including that of the SACP.

Let us explain the main anarchist critiques of Marxism and the SACP:

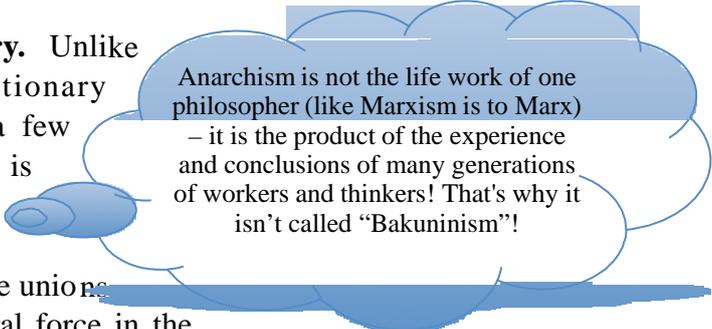
- 1) **While the economy is important, it does not explain everything about society.** There are many examples of laws that are quite irrelevant to the economy. There are also many examples of policies that are actually bad for capitalists and capitalism. For example, the restriction on skills for blacks by apartheid government was actually opposed by white capitalists because they were forced to import skilled white labourers from overseas, which was more expensive!
- 2) **History does not happen in stages or have a direction.** Marx argued that revolutions occur only when the forces of production are fully “developed” – so he predicted that the socialist revolution would happen in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. But in reality it was Russia, a rural peasant economy with very low levels of industrialisation, where the revolution broke out. So Marx’s theory was actually *disproven* by history.
- 3) Linked to this, anarchists believe that **socialism is not inevitable.** We believe that ordinary people have the power to decide what they want for their lives, and to make this a reality. We do not believe that we should sit around and wait for the “forces and relations of production” to “expand” before we can create socialism. We believe that revolutionary people, with the will to change society and revolutionary (anarchist) *ideas*, make revolutions, and that these can occur at any point in history. Because of this **anarchists disagree with the whole notion of the National Democratic Revolution.**
- 4) The **state is not simply the “agent” of capitalists.** Like Marxists, we argue that the function of the state is to defend the class system. But this means that it is only necessary in a situation where a minority ruling class wants to maintain its rule over a majority working class. If the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was truly the expression of the power of workers and the abolition of class, there would be no need for it (nevermind the Soviet army, or a secret police). In fact, the Soviet Union even invaded and colonised, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia and several other countries in Eastern Europe!
- 5) Related, **the state cannot be used by the working class.** A “workers state”, or “dictatorship of the proletariat”, like any other state, will in reality be a state by and for the ruling class. The radicals that join the state will be changed by joining the state; they change their ideas and views. **The former “liberators” of the people will become their oppressors.**


Bakunin predicted that Marx’s “Dictatorship **OF** the proletariat would very soon become a “Dictatorship **OVER** the proletariat”. He was right!
- 6) **Nationalisation does not mean socialism.** Nationalisation simply means that one boss is related another – the state capitalist replaces the private capitalist. Even in the Soviet Union, where almost the entire economy was owned by the state – the working people were still exploited and oppressed. This is why we say that the Soviet Union was state capitalist.

- 7) Anarchists completely disagree with the political programme of the Marxists, which is about substituting the vanguard, or Communist party and its “scientific” ideas for the broader working class. The idea that only a group of “advanced” workers and other intellectuals is able to properly understand society, decide on a way forward, and take power *in the name of the workers* is **authoritarian and elitist**.

Although we do not disagree with the need for a political organisation that can fight for anarchist ideas within the broader social movements and trade unions, we say that ordinary working class people, through the mass organisations, must liberate themselves and establish *self-management* of the economy and society – rather than a “workers state” and nationalisation.

- 8) **Trade Unions can be revolutionary.** Unlike Marxists, we believe that revolutionary consciousness is not something only a few intellectuals can possess. Consciousness is something that is produced through the experience struggling against capitalism and by self education. The anarchist trade unions in the Spanish Revolution were a central force in the revolution. We say that Marxism actually shows a lot of *contempt* for workers and their unions by arguing that they are inherently reformist.



Anarchism is not the life work of one philosopher (like Marxism is to Marx) – it is the product of the experience and conclusions of many generations of workers and thinkers! That's why it isn't called “Bakunism”!

- 9) **Anarchists don't dismiss the peasants, or the unemployed, self employed** as non-revolutionary or “reactionary” forces. Because all of these groups do not fundamentally benefit from capitalism, they have an interest in overthrowing it and have an essential role in ensuring the success of the revolution.

- 10) Anarchists don't reject alliances with non-anarchists – including with Marxists in certain cases. However, **we always follow and fight for our own agenda.** We refuse to become the junior partners of other forces. We refuse to “liquidate” our politics into nationalism. What is the point of being an anarchist if your political work means promoting the nationalists?

## 5. Trotskyism

Trotskyists, who are a kind of Marxists, claim to have the same goal as we anarchists: **a worldwide revolution by the working class and all the oppressed, against the capitalists and their states** (including the remnants of the “Communist” state capitalist regimes) – and to want to replace these states with associations of councils. They claim that they stand for “*socialism from below*”, and claim to “*believe that the power to win real change comes from below...*” Anarchists agree with this.

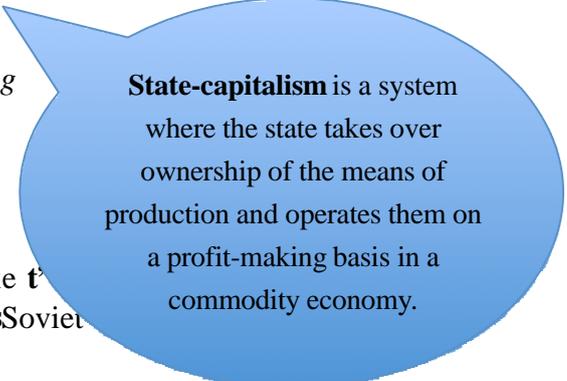
But they ruin it because of their methods: their attempt to re-create the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, which they often refer to as the “**mass workers' party**”, and to do what Lenin and Trotsky did in Russia. However, they are very critical of Stalin – who came after Lenin and Trotsky – and claim that Stalin's Marxism is fundamentally different to that of Lenin's. This is not really true – there is a lot of consistency between the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, even if minor differences exist. When they deviate from wanting to create a “mass workers' party”, it is only to use social democratic methods (which will be discussed later).

## 5.1 Is Trotskyism “socialism from below”?

If Trotskyism is “socialism from below” – as some claim – then why do anarchists reject it? Simply because its rhetoric hides an authoritarian reality. Marx dismissed the famous anarchist Bakunin's vision of revolution being “the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards” as “nonsense.” Lenin agreed. He even admitted that it was anarchism, not Marxism, that stressed socialism from below. In practice, Trotskyists believe in creating a “mass workers’ party” that can take power, either through force or through parliament, and impose its programme – from the top down – on the masses. What Trotskyists should really say is that they stand for “socialism from **above as well as** from below”. But anarchists would argue that we can’t do both: rule from above will triumph, unless it is completely defeated.

There are many different variants of Trotskyism. The main tradition of Trotskyism sees the Soviet Union under Stalin as being a “**degenerated workers’ state**” – that is a workers state that has become compromised so that it is not “pure”. This means that they see the Bolshevik Party and state as becoming a *bureaucratic* layer but not a new *ruling* class.

Some “unorthodox” Trotskyists reject Trotsky’s theory that the Soviet Union under Stalin remained a “degenerated workers’ state.” These types, like the anarchists, see the Soviet Union, as “**state capitalist**” Soviet Union. Where we differ, however, is that anarchists see the Soviet Union as being state-capitalist from the moment the Bolsheviks took power, and not just under Stalin. Trotskyists think that under Lenin the Soviet Union was still a workers’ state.



**State-capitalism** is a system where the state takes over ownership of the means of production and operates them on a profit-making basis in a commodity economy.

This is one thing that separates Trotskyists from the SACP and other Leninists. This section will only deal broadly with this topic, and try to demonstrate why anarchists believe Trotskyist theory and practice cannot bring about a worldwide revolution by the working class and oppressed, and therefore why it is a rival ideology to anarchism.

## 5.2 Why do anarchists reject the idea of “a workers’ state”?

For anarchists, any idea of the “workers’ state” – whether “degenerate” or not – is authoritarian in itself because it means a minority vanguard, or “mass workers’ party” establishing themselves in power – within the state – and imposing their own rule on the workers from above.

The Trotskyist goal is still the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Even though many claim that this can co-exist workers control of industry, Trotskyists continue to support the idea of a centralised party, ruling a centralised state, managing a centralised planned economy, ultimately on an international scale. This would be a monstrously bureaucratic, inefficient, and oppressive system! Anarchists believe that this is incompatible with our goals of a worldwide revolution by the popular classes against capitalism and the state – and cannot lead to freedom and socialism. Instead we propose international federations of associations, decentralised communities and regions, worker-run industries – all planned from the bottom up by negotiation among councils.



Trotskyists seek to create a “workers’ state”. But there is no such thing as a “workers’ state”. Engels defined the state as a “public force” which “consists not merely of armed men but also of material appendages, prisons, and coercive institutions of all kinds....” Its officials are “organs of society **standing above society**....representatives of a power which estranges them from society....**The state is an organisation for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class**”. Does this sound like something the working class can use for its liberation? Certainly not! As we have demonstrated in other modules, history has shown us that all attempts to use the state to free the workers and poor have

ended in disaster. Those who occupy the state end up inheriting the same power and privileges of those they replaced. They develop interests different to those of the working class, and will do anything to defend their new class interests. There are plenty of examples of this in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The ruling class needs the state because they are a minority who needs to hold down the majority in order to maintain their class position and access to wealth and power. The state is only necessary when a minority wants to rule over the majority. The working class and its allies are the big majority. In a revolution, we will not need a bureaucratic, military machine – a so-called “workers’ state” – to hold down the pro-capitalist minority. We will need the self-organisation of the workers and the oppressed themselves: workplace and neighbourhood committees, federated councils, and an armed people, a workers’ militia. This is not a state.

Group Exercise:

**Many Marxists argue that the state can be controlled by the workers, through the vanguard or “mass workers’ party”. Do you agree? Discuss in groups and write down your ideas.**

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### 5.3 Was the USSR a “degenerate workers’ state” or not?

The Russian Revolution was made by the workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky (who were both followers of Marx), rode on the back of it, hijacked it – and then suppressed its achievements of self-management of free soviets. It ended up as a totalitarian nightmare. Because the Bolsheviks aimed for a state, they ended up with a state – a bureaucratic monster that destroyed the Russian Revolution. Some groups of Trotskyists often blame this, not on the Bolsheviks they admire, nor on their poor strategy and tactics, but on “objective circumstances” – Russia’s poverty, the failure of the revolution to spread, etc. All of this was real, but it is also true that the Bolsheviks never advocated multiparty/multi-tendency soviets, workers’ rank-and-file management of industry, independent trade unions, etc. By 1921, when Lenin and Trotsky were in power, they **outlawed all other parties** (and jailed and massacred the anarchists), **banned all caucuses inside the one and only legal party**, the Bolshevik Communist Party, and **insisted that the unions be controlled by the party**. Lenin and actually put bosses back in the factories, and crushed worker self-management, right at the beginning of the revolution - in 1918.



It was Lenin and Trotsky who legalised the single-party police state! **Stalin only built on what they had created.** We anarchists argue that “Stalinist” dictatorship is the logical and inevitable outcome of a centralised, bureaucratic state – even when it is called a “worker’s state”. Trotsky and his Left Opposition fought Stalin on some issues, while agreeing with the single-party dictatorship. Until his death, Trotsky continued to regard Stalin’s dictatorship as a “worker’s state” because the economy was nationalised.

It is wrong to consider it a “workers’ state” just because the economy was nationalised. What makes capitalism is not just the private ownership of the *means of production*, but also **exploitation** through wage slavery in a commodity economy.

While unorthodox Trotskyists claim to be for a “democratic” “workers’ state,” they believe that Lenin and Trotsky ran a “workers’ state” when they established a one-party police state after the Russian Revolution. In fact, they believe that the Soviet Union continued to be a “workers’ state” under Stalin up until 1929 when he began a major industrialisation drive. Therefore they believe that there can be a so-called workers’ state, a rule of the working class, even after the workers have lost all political power for years. Someone else, such as the party, can stand-in for the working class, because the party knows best. This is no better than the views of the orthodox Trotskyists (who defend the Soviet Union). So, both “orthodox” and “unorthodox” Trotskyists agree with the authoritarian and undemocratic vision that a vanguard party must take control of the state in order to achieve socialism.

Although Trotskyists disagree on whether the USSR under Stalin was state-capitalist or a “degenerate workers’ state”, Trotskyist groups in South Africa today continue to support calls for “nationalisation under worker control”. They do this either because they think it is a step towards

socialism, or as part of a “minimum programme” (which we will discuss later). As we have demonstrated previously, however, anarchists argue that this is incorrect. Centralising control of industry and resources in the hands of the state cannot lead to socialism. As we will discuss later, neither can a “minimum programme” of reforms.

#### **5.4 Why do anarchists reject “nationalisation under workers’ control”?**

Nationalisation under workers’ control is the idea that the state can take over **ownership** of an industry **and, at the same time**, allow the workers to **control** industry – while guaranteeing resources to them.

However, exploitation within state-owned enterprises is, at the very least, on par with that which occurs in the private sector – both operate under the oppressive and hierarchical logic of capitalism. In South Africa, state-owned companies (for example Eskom) – whether in the apartheid or post-apartheid period – have been highly oppressive towards workers. Without a doubt, therefore, the state’s interests are the opposite of those of workers because the state is part of the enemy class. As part of ensuring the continued rule by an elite minority, the state’s goals are to safeguard private property and to put measures in place for the capitalist economy to operate as smoothly as possible for the benefit of high ranking state officials and the rich. This is done through depriving workers of property, dominating them and exploiting them. It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that having industries nationalised by the state would have any benefit for workers; on the contrary it would probably lead to the further domination and exploitation of the workers involved. As such, if anything is to be won from the state it has to be won through struggle, and through weakening the state by direct action and not strengthening it by having it take over ownership.

Even if the state was to nationalise industries this would not advance the prospect of real worker self-management at the workplace. The fact that the state would have ownership over the means of production would increase its power over the workers involved. If a conflict between the interests of the state and those of the workers arose, as would inevitably happen, the fact that the state owned the industry would enable it to more easily suppress the demands of the workers involved – as its power as owner would be immense. Rather than being a step towards socialism, having the state take ownership of an industry would further undermine the workers’ power, place them undoubtedly in a position of subordination to a higher authority, and hamper the possibility of class independence. Far from strengthening the workers position; it would weaken it!

Anarchists therefore reject the idea of “nationalisation under workers’ control” as a step towards socialism. We also condemn the dishonest practice of campaigning around dead-end strategies like “nationalisation under workers’ control” as part of a minimum programme.

Group Exercise:

**How do you think anarchists should position themselves in relation to calls for “nationalisation under workers’ control”. Could anarchists support mass-based struggles for nationalisation? Discuss in groups and write down your ideas.**

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### 5.5 What is a “minimum programme”?

A “**minimum programme**” of reforms is something typical of classical Marxism, and was endorsed by Lenin as part of a global “revolutionary” strategy. It is something maintained by Trotskyists today.

The basic idea is that Communists should propose a programme of reforms that are supposed to offer the appearance of bringing genuine benefits to the working class – but that are so extensive as to be unachievable within capitalism. At various times Trotskyists and other Leninists have pushed such programmes either by standing for election in their own right, or by backing social-democratic or nationalist groups while supposedly trying to push them in a more radical direction.

The idea is that, once the “minimum programmes” somehow get to the point of being actually implemented, it would become clear to workers that they *weren’t fully achievable* within capitalism in the first place, something Trotskyists already knew. Thus, the minimum programme is a way of *exposing* capitalism and other bourgeois and social democratic parties. It is designed as a mechanism to let workers see for themselves, and “learn the hard way” that capitalism needs to be overturned.

#### Examples of a “minimum programme” in S.A.:

- Immediate re-nationalisation of all privatised services and assets
- Expropriation and nationalisation of monopoly-owned commercial farms under democratic worker control and management
- Nationalise top-five JSE companies, the Reserve Bank and commercial banks under democratic worker control and management.”

At that point the vanguard, or “mass workers’ party” is supposed to turn round and announce this to the workers, proclaiming that the only solution is “proletarian revolution” and a working class dictatorship, led, of course, by the “mass workers’ party”.

When Trotskyists of the “mass workers’ party” tendency get involved in mass movements, they typically do so with the aim of taking them over (often by winning leadership positions) and carrying them in an electoral direction. They often push for putting up independent candidates in elections. They talk about “socialism” and the working class; but in keeping with their emphasis on the minimum programme, their political education efforts are often quite thin. Rather than trying to build working class strength and self-management, they seek to use working class struggles to build

a support base for themselves, as part of the “vanguard”. In addition, instead of focusing on educating workers and poor about capitalism through honest discussion, self-education and debate, they lead workers down a path they themselves believe to be incorrect! Because of their strategy of trying to take power and rule for the masses, mass workers’ party type Trotskyists generally display a great contempt and disrespect for the working class. This is seen in the (unethical) way in which they seek to lead the working class down a dead-end road of minimum programmes.

## 5.6 “Socialism in one country”, National Democratic Revolution and Internationalism

It is difficult to accurately describe the positions of the various Marxist tendencies on the issues of “Socialism in one country”, National Democratic Revolution and internationalism. This is because of the constantly shifting debates among them.

### 5.6.1 Historical background

When the Bolsheviks took state power in 1917, they thought they were leading the revolution. And they believed the “revolution” could not succeed in Russia alone, because the productive forces in Russia were not advanced enough. As Marxists they thought **social revolution had to happen in the most advanced capitalist countries**; they particularly hoped for revolution in Germany. Actually proletarian revolution did break out in parts of Germany in 1919, but was then crushed by an alliance of the bourgeoisie, the military and the Social Democrats. (Revolutionary movements were strong around the world at this time, from Mexico to China, from the United States to South Africa. Anarchism/syndicalism was the most important ideology of these movements; but many revolutionaries were also attracted by the apparent success of Bolshevism in Russia.)

See the section on the NDR under Marxism

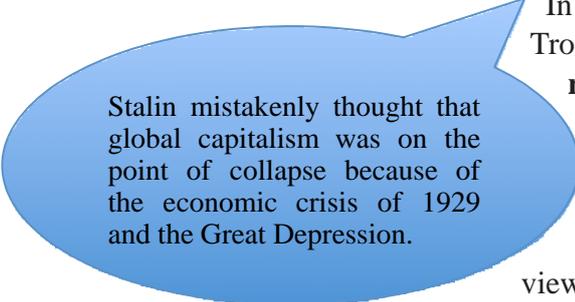


Lenin & Trotsky linked their reliance on revolution in Germany to the view that imperialism was holding back the productive forces elsewhere. In the early 1920s the global revolutionary movements were crushed and defeated – while the Bolsheviks defeated the most revolutionary forces in the Russian Empire itself (the anarchist peasant army in the Ukraine, and the revolutionary sailors in Kronstadt). The retreat of the revolutionary movements left the Bolsheviks in a dilemma. What could they do when revolution was clearly not about to happen in Germany?

From 1924, Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin defended the view that the productive forces in Russia were (just) advanced enough to **keep “socialism” going there for many years, until the revolution spread to the imperialist countries**. “Socialism in one country”, they said, could last a long time.

How was this to work? Stalin's views changed over time. For instance, after 1928 – by which time he had crushed Trotsky and other rivals to become sole dictator – Stalin emphasised the need to industrialise the USSR very rapidly. Previously this had been Trotsky's idea!

For Trotsky, this was part of the thesis of **“permanent revolution”**, an extension of Lenin's view that imperialism was holding back development in colonial countries. Trotsky agreed with Lenin that **the “tasks of the bourgeoisie”, the development of the forces of production, needed to be accomplished in these countries**. But he thought the “national bourgeoisie” was not strong enough to carry them out, and **the “vanguard party of the working class” needed to take the lead**. He thought the party could quickly accomplish the bourgeois task and then **switch to leading a proletarian revolution – provided that the forces of production developed fast enough, and that revolution spread to the advanced countries**.



Stalin mistakenly thought that global capitalism was on the point of collapse because of the economic crisis of 1929 and the Great Depression.

In the early 1930s Stalin's views were actually similar to Trotsky's. He believed that the **“national democratic r evolution”** in colonial countries should be led by the vanguard party, which would develop the forces of production, carry on the tasks of the bourgeoisie, and then switch to proletarian revolution at a later stage. It was only later that Stalin and Stalinists switched to the view that bourgeois nationalist parties (such as the ANC) should lead the NDR, with the support of Communist Parties.

In short, Stalin spoke of NDR and “socialism in one country” while Trotsky called for “permanent revolution” and the spreading of the revolution internationally; but **their programmes came from the same Marxist-Leninist background, and it is sometimes very hard to see any difference in content**.

After he was thrown out of the USSR, Trotsky thought that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) could no longer lead a world revolution because of its “bureaucratic degeneration”. If this “degeneration” was not overcome, he predicted that the “degenerate workers' state” would quickly give way to capitalist counter-revolution.

Stalin denounced Trotsky as an agent of capitalism and fascism, and had him assassinated in Mexico in 1941. After Trotsky's death, Trotskyists faced further dilemmas, especially once the USSR started expanding, conquering, and spreading its system after World War II. It became harder to maintain that the “degenerate workers' state” was post-capitalist but also unable to spread the revolution.

### **5.6.2 Anarchist and Trotskyist “internationalism”**

Trotskyists claim to be internationalists, and argue that socialism is only possible through an international revolution. But if Trotskyists are internationalists, then why do anarchists, who are also internationalists, disagree with them?

Anarchists are internationalists because we are for a united humanity, because we want to end conflict between peoples; and also because both the popular classes and their ruling class enemy are

Some Trotskyists – although not all – supported the USSR's occupations of central/eastern Europe and of Afghanistan, because they believed this was helping to spread socialism!

international. If the popular classes try to win in just one country, they will be attacked by global imperialist forces; if they are not joined by workers within the imperialist countries they are likely to be crushed. (e.g. most imperialist countries – Germany, Italy, Britain, US – gave various forms of support to General Franco against the Spanish revolution.)

Trotskyists claim to be internationalist for many – perhaps all – of the same reasons. But like all classical Marxists, their internationalism must end up being poisoned by their **reliance on the state** and their belief in **stages of history**. Since Marx himself, all classical Marxists have regarded some states as more “advanced” than others, and have therefore supported some states against others. Thus Marx supported British, German, US and sometimes French imperialism as a means to advance capitalism and pave the way for socialism. Lenin and his successors turned against Western imperialism (see the section on Marxism) but still focused on the need to “advance the productive forces” and still wanted to support those states that were most advanced along the road of history in some way or other. Thus both Stalinists and orthodox Trotskyists “defended” the USSR as being in some way post-capitalist, a “socialist state” or “workers state”.

Trotskyists have, of course, criticised the USSR, and were never as fanatically loyal to it than Stalinists. But this was easy for them: they had been defeated and were out of power! They might pour scorn on Stalin's thesis of “socialism in one country”, but they had little in the way of constructive proposals for how to run a “workers' state” differently. They might want to return to the political system that existed in Lenin's time – but, as we have shown, that was actually the same system as Stalin's! Their proposals on economic issues and global strategy were not that different from Stalin's – especially Stalin's programme of the early 1930s.

The Trotskyists never ran a state of their own – unless you count the pre-Stalin USSR when Trotsky was in power. But if they ever did, it would not look that different to the USSR, and they would worship it just as Stalin worshipped the USSR. It would become another party dictatorship patriotically supported by self-styled revolutionaries against its state rivals. And like the USSR and all other states, it would become imperialist if it got the chance.

### 5.7 Neither “mass workers' party” nor “workers' state”



For anarchists, a “workers' state” is by nature degenerate – as are all states – since as we have shown the state is by nature an elitist, authoritarian and undemocratic minority institution, and cannot belong to the workers. Regardless of their motives, the Trotskyist strategy of taking state power to implement social change – even if it is a “mass workers' party” controlling a “workers' state” – will naturally transform into a “degenerate” authoritarian and undemocratic nightmare. For anarchists, the logical and inevitable consequence of using authoritarian, top-down methods is to get authoritarian, top-down results.

Since Trotskyists believe that the “workers’ state” does not have to be **prefigurative** (the “methods” do not have to correspond to the “goals”), and since they believe a “workers’ state” can exist without any control by the workers (as under Lenin and the early reign of Stalin, before it became state-capitalist), then it would seem dangerous to ever let a “mass workers party” get near state power. For anarchists, all attempts by Trotskyists and other authoritarian socialists to drag mass working class movements into elections must be combatted.

However, due to their “minimum programmes” and backing electoral campaigns, Trotskyism is often inclined to water down its revolutionary politics in order to appeal to more voters, who might not support the idea of a revolution. Thus their practice makes them more likely to be like wishy-washy, defeated, social democrats than a revolutionary party that can seize the state.

## 6. Social Democracy

Social democracy is a political ideology and historical political system that considers itself to be a form of democratic **socialism**, although these days social democracy has become associated rather with a “nice” version of capitalism, but with some socialist “rhetoric”. It is considered to be socialist (in theory) because classically its ultimate goal was to get rid of capitalism. Unlike all the models we have discussed so far, this was not based on the idea of a revolution. Instead, social democracy was understood to be a peaceful *parliamentary* road to socialism – where workers and the poor would ultimately achieve a just and fair world by “chipping away” at capitalism through piecemeal reforms. In this way, reforms were understood to have a cumulative effect – lots of reforms (e.g. free healthcare, worker friendly laws, universal university access etc.), brought about by voting in the right party, would equal less capitalism. This is why its methods have been called “salami tactics” – because as you cut off pieces of the salami, the salami gets smaller and smaller! As you can probably see by now, social democracy is an approach that depends heavily on the state for its programme.

“**Rhetoric**” is the art of using language to persuade or manipulate people

The modern social democratic movement came into being through a break within the socialist movement in the early years of the 20th century. Speaking broadly, this break can be described as a parting of ways between those who insisted upon political revolution (capturing state power through revolution) as a precondition for the achievement of socialist goals and those who maintained that a gradual or evolutionary path to socialism was both possible and desirable. So, it comes down to **revolution** versus **evolution**!

This use of the state socialism is something that we have argued against in other modules. We have always emphasised that the road to socialism must always be outside of and against the state because the state is not our ally, but our enemy. Anarchists argue against both political revolution and gradual reform, or ‘evolution’ because both blindly place their faith in the state as the saviour of people. We instead argue that the real true liberation of the workers and poor can come only through a decisive and violent break with the state and capitalist system, through a social revolution from below.

The early social democrats did not reject Marxism (and in fact claimed to uphold it), but a number of key individuals wanted to reform Marx's arguments in order to spread a less hostile criticism of capitalism. Such views were strongly opposed by the revolutionary socialists and anarchists, who argued that any attempt to reform capitalism is doomed to fail, for the reformers would be gradually

corrupted and eventually turn into capitalists themselves. Anarchists went further than the revolutionary socialists, however, arguing that any attempt to introduce socialism through the state, be it by revolutionary or parliamentary means (revolution or reform), would only lead to the establishment of a new ruling class.

## 6.1 Social welfare and reformism

Because of this strategy of chipping away at capitalism, social democracy argues that all citizens should be legally entitled to certain social rights. These are made up of universal access to public services such as: education, health care, workers' compensation, and other services including child care and care for the elderly. A social democracy is often known as a “welfare state” – like Sweden, where supposed universal access to public services is controlled and administered by the state. While anarchists support universal access to all these things, we do not agree that they should all be controlled and administered by the state. We believe that they should be controlled and administered collectively, through worker and community assemblies from the bottom up.

Be it by reform or revolution, anarchists reject the idea of taking over the state as a way to create change, however modest. If we were to look at history, we would see that all parties that entered into the state in order to bring about change, actually got changed themselves, and soon started to accommodate the system. They ended up getting swallowed by the system, and few social democratic parties now really believe they are a part of the socialist movement. In recent years, public services in social welfare states in Europe have been massively cut to help bail out the banks since the onset of the economic crisis. Rather than changing capitalism, the social democratic states have helped to maintain capitalism by blending into it and, at times, giving it a more democratic and just face.

## 6.2 Nationalism and imperialism

Another negative aspect of social democracy is that of nationalism – which as we saw last time is an ideology that ultimately benefits the ruling class. Because social democracy is all about protecting the rights of its citizens, citizens of a particular nation-state, it becomes hostile to anyone who it does not consider to be part of that nation. When public services are owned and controlled by the state they are usually kept out of the reach of immigrants and foreigners, giving social welfare nationalist characteristics. Claiming to do so out of national interest, social democrats promote nationalism and hostility towards foreigners.

Moreover, again supposedly in the national interest and in the interest of expanding the wealth and influence of the state in question, social democratic states also seek to expand their investment in other countries in order to reap more wealth for the state. While this is supposedly done so that more resources will be available for national development and provision of basic services, in practice these states develop imperialist characteristics. In order to make a profit for the state, they exploit and oppress people from the countries they invest in – usually so-called “Third World” or developing countries.

**Labour Parties** have similar programmes to Social Democratic Parties (SDPs); the difference of name reflects different histories that aren't all that significant for our purposes. The term “Labour Party” is particularly popular in Anglophone countries: Britain, Australia, the white Labour Party in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century SA.

### 6.3 Social dialogue and cross-class alliances

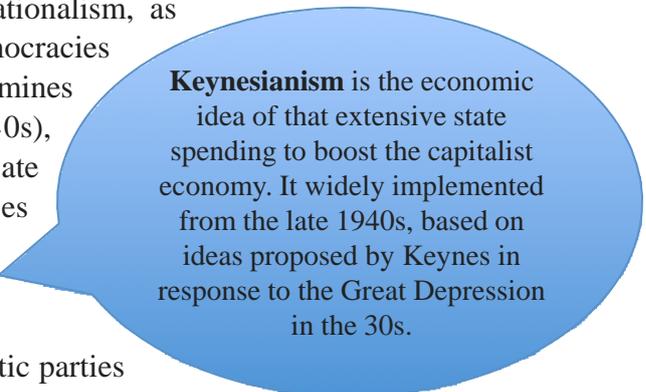
Social democracy is connected with the trade union labour movement and supports collective bargaining rights for workers. This is done through a “social dialogue” between representatives of labour (the trade union bureaucracy), big business and the state. An example of a social dialogue and collective bargaining in South Africa is Nedlac. Social democracy says that better conditions can be made for workers through the unions negotiating with big business and the state and trying to influence government policies to favour workers and the poor. The logic of this approach is that all the “stakeholders” need to come together as “partners” and co-operate – in the “national interest”. The idea is that it is possible to create a win-win situation, where the state can mediate between bosses and the workers, and everyone can all be happy.

But we know that workers and the poor do not have the same interests as the bosses and the state! And we know that the bosses exploit the workers for their own selfish interests! Furthermore, the strength of workers and the poor is in their numbers and their mass organisations, not in tiny boardrooms with experts and technicians. “Social dialogue” therefore ignores the fact that workers do not come to the table as equal partners because bosses. This is why the elite call for social dialogue: because it is just a tool to tie the unions up in bureaucracy and paperwork and limit their real strength – direct action by members. Social dialogue also contributes to the bureaucratisation and weakening of the unions because union employees spend more time negotiating with the bosses than organising the rank-and-file for strikes and direct action.

### 6.4 The demise of social democracy

Social democracies flourished in the mid-twentieth century, especially in Western Europe – with Sweden perhaps being the best example.

Apart from welfare, class collaboration and nationalism, as discussed above, other key features of social democracies in power include partial nationalisations (e.g. mines and railways in Labour Britain in the late 40s), minimum wages and other regulations on the private capitalists. In practice, social democratic states incorporated a lot of ideas from Keynesianism, like welfare and free social services.



**Keynesianism** is the economic idea of that extensive state spending to boost the capitalist economy. It widely implemented from the late 1940s, based on ideas proposed by Keynes in response to the Great Depression in the 30s.

By implementing this framework, social democratic parties moved in the direction of abandoning even the *idea* that their programme would eventually lead to the abolition of capitalism. And by the time they had adopted this framework of policies, most of them *did* reject Marxism.

At the same time, the social democrats appeared highly successful as **managers of capitalist economies**. Their ascendancy from the 1940s to the early 1970s coincides with the most impressive period of economic growth in the history of capitalism. And especially in the “First World”, the working class received significant material benefits (high wages, welfare) – at the cost of political demobilisation through class collaboration.

But capitalist growth can't last forever. And social democracy depended on particular conditions: notably, state-led and nationalist as it was, social democracy was made possible by twentieth century economic *de-globalisation*, by an increase in the autonomy of national economies (in contrast to the earlier wave of globalisation around the end of the nineteenth century). When globalisation took off again in the 1970s, the independence of national economies began to fail. At the same time, a major economic crisis put an end to the years of growth. And at last social democracy succumbed, giving way to **neo-liberalism**: globalisation-from-above driven by multi-national corporations, financial capital, and the World Bank/IMF. This meant "free trade" deals to protect and strengthen multinationals; the decline of regulation of private capital; attacks on minimum wages, welfare, and unions; widening gaps of wealth (both within and between countries), pointing towards a planet of slums; privatisation; and not least, strong lean states with extensive police and prison structures to crush proletarian resistance. This trend largely swept away the social-democracies and welfare states of the "First World", the state-capitalist regimes of the "Second World" and the various developmental-nationalist/import-substitution states of the "Third World". The ideologies of these regimes likewise succumbed; for instance, most leading social-democratic and **Labour Parties** have in practice embraced neoliberalism (e.g. Britain, France, Germany, Australia, and more recently Brazil). So have anti-colonial nationalist parties such as the ANC. It is in these circumstances that calls for social-democracy (e.g. by Cosatu) now appear as little more than useless rhetoric.

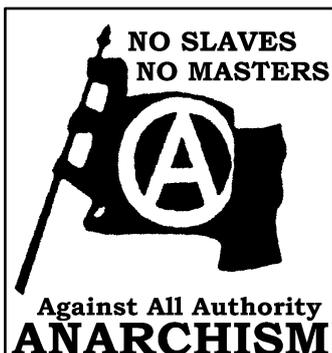
**The ideologies of statist socialism and nationalism have failed and been defeated. It is time for anti-state socialism to take the lead.**

## **6.5 The anarchist road to socialism: neither "welfare state" nor "workers' state"**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Marxism has been discredited for many people. This is not only because the system was unable to hold out against capitalism, but because of the nature of the system in the first place. In particular, the Soviet Union (under Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin) was:

- severely **authoritarian** and oppressive (almost 100 million people were killed under Stalin alone)
- **inefficient** and unable to provide for the majority of the workers and the poor
- **imperialist**
- **not that different** from ordinary capitalism (except that industry was mostly nationalised)

In fact, it was the workers and poor of the Soviet bloc that pushed for the return of the free market!



But not all workers have given up on a getting better deal than capitalism. Since the decline of the Soviet Union, popularity has begun to flow back into other radical traditions like anarchism. In many cases, people have begun to recognise that the Russian anarchists in the Russian revolution raised many important warnings about what would be produced by the elitist and authoritarian logic of Marxism and its strategies (which apply to all its variants including the SACP and Trotskyism).

For example, Bakunin argued that "when the people are being beaten by a stick, they are not much happier when it is called 'the peoples' stick'".

We disagree that the Soviet Union was some sort of deviation, or “exception” from “true” Marxism. What happened in the Soviet Union was a product of its theory and strategy, which were derived from Marxism. And because communist parties and Marxist groups all over the world endorsed Marxism, many of them (the SACP, as well as many groups of Trotskyists) *condoned* the terrible things – mass murder, torture, concentration camps, invasion and colonialism – that were perpetrated by the Soviet Union. In fact, these horrors were not unique to the Soviet Union; “actually existing socialism” everywhere suffers the same problems and has proved to be equally devastating for the working class. **This is because all these systems were based in the authoritarian logic of Marxism.**

Social democratic countries like Sweden were far less repressive and protected many civil freedoms, and for a time provided a lot of material benefits to workers and the poor. But these benefits came at a huge cost: workers and the poor had to rely on the state for everything, and their organisations and trade unions were made toothless by the logic of “social dialogue”. More importantly, social democracy in practice is just a nicer version of capitalism, which does nothing to rid the world of exploitation and oppression.

Bakunin made an early and powerful critique of the statist, reformist, class-collaborationist and counter-revolutionary tendencies of then emerging social democracy.

"...all historical experience shows that an alliance concluded between two different parties always benefits the more backward - the more advanced party is inevitably weakened because the alliance diminishes and distorts its programme and destroys its moral strength and self-confidence; whereas when a backward party lies, it always finds itself closer than ever to its own truth ... I have no hesitation in saying that all the Marxist flirtations with bourgeois radicalism - reformist or revolutionary - can have no other outcome than the demoralisation and disorganisation of the nascent power of the proletariat, and therefore the further consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie." (Bakunin, 1870s.)

Neither the SACP, nor Trotskyism or social democracy are able to provide a suitable programme for the workers and the poor.

## Way Forward

### Anarchists

- fight against exploitation and all forms of oppression
- naturally this means that we oppose both capitalism and imperialism
- naturally this also means that we fight against national oppression. However, we reject the notion of NDR, and the idea of “stages of history”. We always maintain our political independence from nationalist parties and social democrats, and attempt to combine the revolutionary struggle of the popular classes with the national liberation struggle against racism and imperialism into a single struggle – to be won **simultaneously**.
- We do not mislead the working class. We are honest about what works and what doesn't and do not set up unrealistic demands that can't be won in the name of self-education. Instead, we involve ourselves in the workers struggle as means to build our knowledge, but we also

commit to intensive study and learning so that we can effectively understand capitalism and the state and determine the way forward.

- We do not claim to want to lead the working class and to take power in their name. Our goal is to build a revolutionary counter-power and counterculture that empowers workers for their own self-liberation. Our political vanguard is a vanguard of ideas only.
- We are internationalists. We believe the working class in one country always has more in common with the working class in another country, than members of the same culture from the ruling class. We strive for an international revolution of the popular classes. But unlike Marxists, we see internationalism as incompatible with the national state.

The anarchist Bakunin asked how Marxists could “speak of international solidarity when they wanted to keep states” because “the state by its nature the very rupture of this solidarity and permanent cause of war?”
- We are revolutionaries. We want to abolish the system of capitalism and the state as soon as possible. We oppose the notion that capitalism is a necessary precondition for socialism, and refuse to accept capitalism as a “necessary evil”. On the other hand, we completely oppose the idea that we can reform away the inherent problems in capitalism by “salami tactics”. All attempts at this have ended in workers being caught up in capitalism, watering down their demands, and even abandoning their programme for socialism. Our fight must be outside and against the state, and outside and against capitalists.
- We argue for self-management and workers’ control, not nationalisation and a “workers” or “welfare” state. We need to seriously confront the illusion that the state is the friend of the people. *No* state – and no revolution - has ever nationalised anything in order to place it under workers’ control. Our fight is to *reduce* the power of the state by building a counter power that places real power in the hands of the people. This is in contrast with almost all Marxists, including the SACP and Trotskyists and social democrats, which aim to *increase* its role and scope power!

**Only a revolutionary, mass-based, directly democratic movement of all the workers and oppressed, that is organised from the base up – outside and against the state – can offer us any hope achieving true socialism!**

