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Anarchy: Breaking Up With Socialism

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Fighting For Anarchy,
Bobby Whittenberg-James

anarchists of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions or the Spanish Civil War who were either incarcerated or executed at the hands of “comrades.”

Fight For Anarchy!

Many times allegiance to the left or to socialism manifests itself as anarchists constantly placing themselves in a role where they leave the fight for anarchy to fight for leftism. The socialist doesn't leave the fight for socialism to fight for anarchy out of “solidarity.” They know what they are fighting for, and it is certainly not anarchy.

But do we know what *we* are fighting for? Are we so enchanted by co-opted language and pseudo-radical rhetoric, so desperate for allies that we continue to repeat past mistakes knowing full well the consequences? Do we really *think* think that anarchy is anything remotely like leninism or social democracy, and that if we tag along with lefties long enough, we'll end up there?

It is true that some early anarchists called themselves socialists or communists. Some still do. It is true that some early anarchists even carried the red flag. We are not frozen in time, however. Since that time, the red flag has been stained with the blood of many an anarchist, autonomist, and other anti-authoritarians. We did not sign a lifetime commitment, for better or worse, to socialism. We are not married to these ideas or these organizations. Perhaps we are historic allies with the socialists, but that brand of nostalgia and unquestioning allegiance has no place in a revolution and has proven to lead us to jails, prison camps, and death at the hand of the socialists.

In the days ahead and the uncertainty they hold, it would behoove us to question our tactics and our allegiances and make sure that we really are aligning ourselves with people who want the same things we do. We set ourselves up to fail again when we align ourselves with and invest trust in authoritarians. They have shown us over and over again what they will do when we ally ourselves with them. To continue to do so in the face of all evidence is sycophancy at best. Anarchy has nothing to concede to authority or statism and we have nothing to concede in the fight for anarchy.

For well over a century, some anarchists have aligned themselves with socialists of various shades, even fighting on the same side for different periods of time in several failed revolutions. We do not wish to rewrite history or to downplay this alliance, but to learn from it, challenge it, and question its role in the fight for anarchy today while advocating for its immediate and total annulment.

We can define socialism loosely as an economic system in which wealth and property are held either in common or by the state and/or party, in which the means of production and control of distribution are held by the state and/or party, workers, or the whole of society. Socialism can range from leninist totalitarianism to social democracy, to libertarian socialism and social anarchism.

Even under these broad strokes, anarchy escapes. Anarchy is not production and consumption, federations and councils, meetings, and voting and it certainly isn't the state. Such institutions are authoritarian. Anarchy is autonomous individuals associating with others voluntarily to fulfill their needs and desires. This is probably best exemplified among hunter/gatherer bands. Socialism, like capitalism is an economic system, and anarchy seeks to abolish economics altogether.

Leninism

Leninism is a form of socialism largely characterized by a vanguard party seizing power and imposing the dictatorship of the proletariat upon the masses, allegedly to guide them through socialism into communism.

There are some things that most leninists know that most anarchists don't seem to and should. They know that anarchists are enemies of leninism and that anarchy and leninism are antithetical to one another. They understand that authority is a key issue. They will not budge in their defense of it. We should not budge in our opposition to it. Leninists know too that anarchists have a history of trusting them. They know that they have always been able to fool us with rhetoric for as long as they need us, and lock us up or shoot us when they no longer find us useful.

Many an anarchist has been deceived at one time or another (and this writer is no exception) by rhetoric to the tune of “*we want the same things, we just have different ideas about how to get there.*” While it may be true that many of the rank and file socialists truly believe that their program will lead to a liberated, classless society, the methods they use are statist and authoritarian and traditionally include the repression, incarceration, and execution of anarchists and other anti-authoritarians.

Libertarian/Anarcho- Socialism and Authoritarian Socialism?

A trotskyist acquaintance once said something about it not being helpful to distinguish between authoritarian and libertarian socialism. At the time I disagreed, but now I think he is right. Socialism is inherently authoritarian. Even with anarcho-prefixes and red and black flags, socialism subjugates the individual, EVERY individual, to the authority of the masses, the headless, unaccountable bureaucracy and separates each individual from the masses, from society as a whole. Each individual must struggle then against the whole of society for freedom, for anarchy. What good is it to free society if each individual is not free *from* society? From economics? From the commune? From the federation? It is not anarchy if it is not free of bureaucracy, no matter how “directly democratic” it is purported to be.

A highly organized society of councils, unions, and federations just replaces one impersonal, bureaucracy with another and renders people cogs in a new machine. Granted they are cogs in a self organized machine, but cogs in a machine they remain, slaves to a phantom.

Standing on Our Own Ground

The enemy of our enemy is not necessarily our friend. All too often I hear anarchists defending or supporting socialist regimes past or present. Those are the very same regimes that would have us imprisoned or

killed. Rather than defending leninist or other left/socialist regimes out of some perceived sense of obligatory allegiance to the left, we should instead be honest and forthcoming with an anarchist critique. We should make it very clear that we oppose both capitalism and socialism. In doing so, we stand on our own ground rather than defending someone else’s indefensible ideology and history. We should not back away from anarchy to defend socialism, an ideology that is inconsistent with our wills and desires and one that has consistently systematically oppressed our comrades. It is not our job to be apologists for leninism or socialism. Rest assured the socialists are not spending their time defending anarchy.

Separate Trajectories

Liberalism, Social Democracy, and Leninism make up a good chunk of what is commonly referred to as “the left.” All of them are characterized by authoritarian rule and bureaucracy. Nowhere along such a trajectory would anarchy fall. Liberalism (at least in rhetoric) and social democracy offer a large, bloated, bureaucratic welfare state and leninism offers a bureaucratic totalitarian dictatorship. The pattern along this trajectory shows an increase in the strength, might, and authority of the state. How does one arrive at the conclusion that anarchy, the absence of all government falls somewhere further along this trajectory? How close do we expect to get to anarchy following a trajectory that leads to an all powerful, authoritarian state? How long do we fight alongside the socialists, and the rest of the left advancing their cause at the expense of the fight for anarchy?

We should not view socialists as folks who “just need to take their beliefs a bit farther” because regardless of what lies beyond leninism on that trajectory, of this we can be certain: it is not anarchy. In all likelihood they have already taken their beliefs as far as they intend to.

Because anarchy and socialism are on different trajectories and have such vastly different means of revolutionary practice it is inevitable that we will reach an impasse. The longer we misalign ourselves, the more devastating it will be when we reach that impasse. If you do not understand what happens at this impasse, just ask the ghosts of the