How Marxism Influenced Anarchism

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Learn how Marxism influenced the early anarchist movement in good and bad ways.

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During the latter half of the 19th century anarchism and Marxism emerged as social movements in parallel and opposition to one another. Marxists and anarchists (anarchist communists and anarchist collectivists) agreed on the broad end goal of a stateless, classless, moneyless society, in which the means of production and land were owned in common and production and distribution were organised, co-ordinated, and planned through the free and equal association of the producers (Baker 2023, 79–93; Baker 2025). The principal disagreement between anarchism and Marxism was about how to achieve this broad end goal. Marxists generally believed that the working class must conquer state power, establish a workers' state, and use it to overthrow the capitalist class. Once the revolution had been successful and a classless society achieved, the state would wither away (MECW 24, 320–21; MECW 26, 272; Lenin 1968, 265–335). Anarchists, in contrast, generally thought that workers should simultaneously abolish capitalism and the state and establish their own independent organs of self-management – workplace and community associations – and armed self-defence – workers' militias. After the revolution, workers would lay down their arms and transition to living under full communism or collectivism (Baker 2023, 99–107, 154–61). This interpretation of the core dividing line between Marxism and anarchism was acknowledged by authors at the time, such as the anarchists Michael Bakunin (Bakunin 1990, 179), Peter Kropotkin (Kropotkin 2018, 211), Errico Malatesta (Malatesta 2015, 137–38), and Luigi Fabbri (Fabbri 2017, 19–20).

Anarchism and Marxism of course agreed and disagreed on other points beyond this. A few brief examples are as follows. Both Bakunin and Marx: embraced materialism and conceptualised reality in terms of processes and relations between parts that make up an interconnected whole (Marx 1990, 93, 102–3; Marx 1993, 99–100; Bakunin 1964, 53–68); broke the broad sweep of human history down into a series of economic periods characterised by specific kinds of technology, ways of organising production, and class divisions (Marx and Engels 1996, 1–9; Marx 1996, 159–60; Bakunin 1985, 174, 188–91); and argued that humans are social animals who can only be free in and through social relations (MECW 5, 78; Bakunin 1985, 46–8). Even on the contentious topic of strategy, they both endorsed the achievement of universal human emancipation through the self-emancipation of the working classes and viewed class struggle by workers as the driving force of revolutionary social change under capitalism (Marx 1990, 449, 929–30; Marx 1992, 256–7; MECW 20, 14, 148–49; MECW 24, 340; Bakunin 1985, 97–110).[1]

[1] This went alongside an argument about what forms of class struggle were most effective, the revolutionary potential of different kinds of worker, and how the word 'proletariat' should be defined

The points of disagreement between anarchism and Marxism were similarly diverse. Marxists generally advocated the formation of political parties that engaged in electoral politics, while anarchists rejected this and only endorsed direct action outside of and against the state (Baker 2023, 130–35, 143–53; MECW 24, 340; Taber 2021, 39–40, 51–2). Marxists, in turn, critiqued those anarchists who believed that assassinations and bombings were an effective means to spread anarchist ideas and build towards or trigger a mass working class uprising (MECW 50, 254–55, 272, 287; Plekhanov 1912, 135–42). Yet several debates between anarchism and Marxism also occurred within these social movements themselves such that these differences do not map onto a simple anarchism versus Marxism dichotomy. This can be seen in the two examples I just gave. Firstly, in the 1920s Marxists who were council communists rejected electoral politics and participation in bourgeois parliaments because it was inappropriate to the era of proletarian revolution. They were then critiqued by other Marxists like Lenin for adopting this position (KAPD 1920; Lenin 1968, 539–47). Secondly, Malatesta and Kropotkin critiqued other anarchists who advocated the strategy of assassinations and bombings on the grounds that it would not lead to fundamental social change and was actively harmful when it killed or wounded innocent civilians (Malatesta 2014, 187–91; Malatesta 2015 53–8; Malatesta 2016, 58, 125–27, 263–65; Miller 1976, 206–7).

It is furthermore the case that individuals in both camps misrepresented each other's ideas and made ridiculous accusations that have no basis in reality.[2] For example, in 1914 the anarchist Max Baginski described Marx as "a scholastic, a theoretician, the founder of a system that began with the claim of infallibility, but which is now doomed to disintegration, its very foundations crumbling to dust" (Baginski 2000, 70). Marxists have nonetheless always been better at making things up about their ideological opponents. This includes such notable examples as Lenin's embarrassing assertion in 1901 that anarchists have contributed "no doctrine, revolutionary teaching, or the-

(which is a different question from how worker should be defined). For Bakunin's views on the peasantry and the so-called destitute proletariat see Bakunin 1973, 253–54; Bakunin 1990, 6–8, 177–78, 198–217; Bakunin 2002, 189–209. For the various meanings of the proletariat in 19th century socialism see Baker 2024.

[2] A recurring accusation that anarchists and Marxists made against each other was plagiarism. In 1851 Engels told Marx that the mutualist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who was the first known person to politically self-identify as an anarchist, had "indubitably lifted" his analysis of the state as an instrument of class rule that will disappear with the resolution of class contradictions from the Communist Manifesto and perhaps Marx's articles in the press (MECW 38, 435). In an amusing twist of fate, Proudhon himself believed that parts of Marx's The Poverty of Philosophy plagiarised ideas without credit from the very book it was critiquing, namely Proudhon's System of Economic Contradictions. He wrote in the margins of Marx's book, "Does Marx have the pretentiousness to claim all of this as his own, in opposition to something contrary which I am supposed to have said?", "But all that it is me!", "Plagiarism of my first chapter", "What! Come on now! But the preceding pages are copies of my own" (Quoted in McKay, 2017). Decades later in the early 1900s the Georgian anarchist Varlam Cherkezishvili accused Marx and Engels of having plagiarised the Communist Manifesto from an earlier book by the French socialist Victor Considerant (Cherkezishvili 1902, 55–66). This claim was then repeated by other anarchists like Malatesta (Malatesta 2023, 213) and Rocker (Rocker 1925).

ory" to "recent European history", "produced nothing but general platitudes against exploitation", and have failed to develop "an understanding of the class struggle as the creative force for the realisation of socialism" (Lenin 1960, 327–28). The anarchist movement, contrary to Marxist stereotypes, did not lack theory and produced a ridiculous amount of sophisticated ideas on numerous topics. This includes revolutionary strategy (Baker 2023), the global economy and contemporary productive forces (Kropotkin 1902), the state (Kropotkin 2018, 231–348), the Paris Commune (Kropotkin 2014, 439–54; Malatesta 2019, 238–44), prisons (Goldman 1996, 332–46; Kropotkin 1991), imperialism (Tierney 2015; Adams and Kinna 2017), colonialism (Ferretti 2013), nationalism (Rocker 1937); organised religion (Bakunin 1970), evolutionary biology (Kropotkin 2006; Kropotkin 1995a), the French revolution (Kropotkin 1989a), homosexuality (Kissack 2008), and patriarchy (Goldman 2016; Liu et al 2013).

Despite there being significant and important differences between anarchism and Marxism, anarchists also often drew upon aspects of Marxist social theory that they deemed relevant and useful to their cause. This intellectual flexibility and open mindedness does not prove that anarchism is theoretically weak. A non-dogmatic approach to the study of society is a virtue, rather than a vice. If anarchism is to be judged for using other people's ideas, then so too should Marxism. Marx famously drew upon and was massively influenced by (amongst other sources) British political economy, French socialism, and German philosophy (Marx 1996, 158–59; MECW 39, 62; Lenin 1963, 23–4). This list of influences included the 1840 book What is Property? by the French mutualist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who was the first person to politically self-identify as an anarchist (Proudhon 1994, 205). In 1845 Marx praised the book as follows,

> Proudhon makes a critical investigation — the first resolute, ruthless, and at the same time scientific investigation — of the basis of political economy, private property. This is the great scientific advance he made, an advance which revolutionises political economy and for the first time makes a real science of political economy possible. Proudhon's treatise Qu'est-ce que la propriété? [What is Property?] is as important for modern political economy as Sieyès' work Qu'est-ce que le tiers état? [What is the Third Estate?] for modern politics" (MECW 4, 32. For Marx's later critical reflections on Proudhon see MECW 20, 26–33).

Engels was similarly enthusiastic. He wrote in November 1843, which is before he became friends with Marx, that What is Property? is "the most philosophical work, on the part of the Communists, in the French language; and, if I wish to see any French book translated into the English language, it is this. The right of private property, the consequences of this institution, competition, immorality, misery, are here developed with a power of intellect, and real scientific research, which I never since found united in a single volume" (MECW 3, 399). With this point in mind, I shall now turn to an examination of how Marxist social theory influenced anarchism, both for good and for ill.

Bakunin and Marx

Bakunin first met Marx on March 23 1844 at a gathering of socialist and republican radicals in Paris. This led to further meetings between the two, which were abruptly ended when Marx was expelled from Paris in January 1845 for his radical journalism. Their connection was briefly rekindled in Brussels between December 1847 and February 1848, during which time Bakunin attended two meetings of the Democratic Federation that Marx was vice president of. In July 1848 Marx published, in his role as editor of the New Rhenish Newspaper (Neue Rheinische Zeitung), a false accusation that Bakunin was a police spy for the Russian state and had played a key role in the arrest of some Polish people. This accusation was credited to the paper's Paris correspondent, who alleged that they had been told by someone that the French novelist George Sand possessed documents which proved the matter and had showed them to her friends. No proof of this rumour was provided because there was none. Marx only retracted the accusation, which amounted to fedjacketing, after Sand wrote an open letter to the paper informing them that the allegations were entirely false. Marx did, to his credit, reprint this letter. But he never should have spread accusations without evidence in the first place and failed to conform to the most basic journalistic standards, such as double-checking with Sand first. In the aftermath of these events, Bakunin and Marx met again in Berlin. According to Bakunin's diary entry, the two men made up and had an amicable conversation (Carr 1975, 125–30, 145–46, 163–64; Guillaume 2001, 25–9).

At this point in time Bakunin was a republican revolutionary democrat and had yet to become a socialist, let alone an anarchist socialist (Corrêa 2024, 93, 193, 475). Decades later in 1871 Bakunin reflected on these early meetings as follows,

> As far as learning was concerned, Marx was, and still is, incomparably more advanced than I. I knew nothing at that time of political economy, I had not yet rid myself of my metaphysical aberrations, and my socialism was only instinctive. Although younger than I, he was already an atheist, a conscious materialist, and an informed socialist. It was precisely at this time that he was elaborating the foundations of his system as it stands today. We saw each other often. I greatly respected him for his learning and for his passionate devotion–though it was always mingled with vanity–to the cause of the proletariat. I eagerly sought his conversation, which was always instructive and witty when it was not inspired by petty hate, which alas! was only too often the case. There was never any frank intimacy between us–our temperaments did not permit it. He called me a sentimental idealist, and he was right; I called him vain, perfidious, and cunning, and I also was right (Quoted in Guillaume 2001, 25).

The two men did not see each other again until November 3 1864. It was the last time they ever met face to face (Carr 1975, 305–7). Marx informed Engels that Bakunin,

who was now a socialist (Corrêa 2024, 186, 197n29), "is one of the few people whom after 16 years I find to have moved forwards and not backwards" (MECW 42, 19). Between 1868 and 1872 the two former friends became bitter political rivals who each played a key role in opposed factions of the International Workingmen's Association (Eckhardt 2016). This context is why the main occasion when Bakunin wrote about Marx was to critique his state socialist strategy and sectarian actions as a member of the International's general council (Bakunin 1973, 232–63; Bakunin 1990; Bakunin 2002, 418–20; Bakunin 2016a, 135, 215–16, 222–41).

The conflict in the International was also deeply personal. Marx and Engels regularly insulted Bakunin in their correspondence (MECW 43, 193, 200, 490, 507) and publicly spread slander and false accusations against him. This most notably included the untrue charge that he was an authoritarian schemer who was attempting to become the dictator of the International and impose his anarchist programme onto it (MECW 23, 79–123; 243–253; 454–580. For a refutation of these accusations see Eckhardt 2016; Baker 2023, 308–21). Bakunin made a few brief antisemitic remarks about Marx in his published work and several far more racist claims in letters and drafts (Baker 2021). In general, he described Marx as a vain, ambitious, argumentative, egomaniac who wanted to rule over others. Yet he also genuinely admired certain intellectual qualities of Marx. In an 1872 letter to Italian radicals Bakunin claimed that, "Marx is the premier scholar of economics and socialism of our time. In my life I have met many scholars, but I have never known any as gifted and profound as he" (Quoted in Ravindranathan 1988, 149). A year later he wrote in Statism and Anarchy that, "rarely can a man be found who knows so much and reads so much, and reads so intelligently, as Marx" (Bakunin 1990, 142. Also see Bakunin 1973, 244).

This positive evaluation of Marx's mental powers came from both Bakunin's conversations with the man and his familiarity with Marx's written works. The Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto was translated by Bakunin and published in 1869 by associates of his in Geneva (MECW 24, 425, 649n481). That year Bakunin also began to translate Capital Volume One into Russian, a copy of which Marx had personally sent to him in late 1867 (MECW 42, 577, 582). Unfortunately Bakunin, who like Marx had a habit of starting projects and not finishing them, never completed it. This translation work nonetheless forced Bakunin to read through Marx carefully, sentence by sentence, in order to create an accurate rendition of it in another language. From this labour he gained a great appreciation for Marx's knowledge and analysis of economic conditions (Eckhardt 2016, 323–30).

In the November-December 1870 drafts of The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution Bakunin described Capital as a "magnificent work" and made use of its ideas in his analysis and critique of wage labour (Bakunin, n.d. For the convoluted history of how the book was written see Eckhardt 2016, 67–71, 373). He commented in a footnote,

> This work will need to be translated into French, because nothing, that I know of, contains an analysis so profound, so luminous, so scientific, so decisive, and if I can express it thus, so merciless an expose of the formation of bourgeois capital and the systematic and cruel exploitation that capital continues exercising over the work of the proletariat. The only defect of this work... positivist in direction, based on a profound study of economic works, without admitting any logic other than the logic of the facts — the only defect, say, is that it has been written, in part, but only in part, in a style excessively metaphysical and abstract... which makes it difficult to explain and nearly unapproachable for the majority of workers, and it is principally the workers who must read it nevertheless. The bourgeois will never read it or, if they read it, they will never want to comprehend it, and if they comprehend it they will never say anything about it; this work being nothing other than a sentence of death, scientifically motivated and irrevocably pronounced, not against them as individuals, but against their class (Bakunin, n.d.).

In the 1870 Letters to a Frenchman in the Present Crisis Bakunin praised the book in similar terms:

> His great work Das Kapital is not a fantasy or an a priori concept hatched in a single day out of the mind of a young man more or less ignorant of the economic condition of society and the prevailing system of production. It is based on very detailed and extensive knowledge and analysis in depth of that system and its conditions. Herr Marx is a mine of statistical and economic information. His book on capital, although unfortunately bristling with metaphysical formulae and subtleties which make it inaccessible to the vast majority of readers, is positivist and realist to the highest degree, in the sense that it accepts no logic but the logic of facts (Bakunin 1973, 233).

In some passages Bakunin endorsed an economically deterministic interpretation of Marx's theory of history. In the February-March 1871 drafts of The Knouto-Germanic Empire he claimed that the basis for the theory of German communists is,

> a principle that is profoundly true when we consider it in its true light, from a relative point of view, but which, considered and posited in an absolute manner, as the unique foundation and first source of all the other principles, as that school does, becomes completely false.
>
> This principle, which constitutes, by the way, the essential foundation of positive socialism, has been scientifically formulated and developed for the first time by Karl Marx, the principal leader of the school of German communists...

> This principle is absolutely opposed to the principle recognized by the idealists of all the schools. While the latter derive all the facts of history, including the development of material interests and the different phases of the economic organization of society, from the development of ideas, the German communists, on the contrary, wish to see in all of human history, in the most ideal manifestations of the life, whether individual or collective, of society, of humanity, in all the intellectual and moral, religious, metaphysical, scientific, artistic, political, legal and social developments, which were produced in the past and continue to be produced in the present, nothing but reflections or necessary repercussions of the development of the economic facts. While the idealists claim that ideas dominate and produce facts, the communists, in agreement in this with scientific materialism, say on the contrary that the facts give rise to the ideas and that the latter are never anything but the ideal expression of accomplished facts; and that among all the facts, the economic or material facts, the facts par excellence, constitute the essential basis, the principal foundation, of which all the other facts, intellectual and moral, political and social, are nothing more than the inevitable derivatives (Bakunin 2016b).

This is followed by the rhetorical question: "who are right, the idealists or the materialists?" Bakunin responded, "undoubtedly the idealists are wrong and the materialists right. Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history" (Bakunin 1970, 9. Also see Bakunin 1990, 207). In the June 1872 letter To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain, Bakunin similarly wrote that, "Marx, as a thinker, is on the right track. He has established as a principle that all the political, religious and legal evolutions in history are not causes, but effects of the economic evolutions. It is a great and productive thought, that he has not absolutely invented: it has been glimpsed, expressed in part, by many others than him; but finally, to him belongs the honor of having solidly established it and having posited it as the basis of his whole economic system" (Bakunin 2014).

Bakunin considered this model to be in line with the natural sciences. His August 1871 response to the republican revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini's attack on the Paris Commune contained several tangents about materialism. As part of one he explained, "just as in the material world proper, inorganic matter (mechanical, physical, chemical) is the determinant of organic matter (vegetable, animal, mental or cerebral), so in the social world, which in any case can only be considered as the highest-known level of the material world, the development of economic forces has always been and still continues to be the determinant of all religious, philosophical, political and social developments" (Bakunin 1973, 223–24). He then approvingly quoted Marx's preamble to the Rules of the International, which declared that the "economic subjection" of labour to capital

"lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence" (Ibid, 224–25. For the original see MECW 20, 14).

On a few occasions Bakunin sharply distinguished between the materialist social theory he subscribed to and what he regarded as the idealism of Proudhon. In the 1873 book Statism and Anarchy Bakunin wrote,

> Undoubtedly there is a good deal of truth in the merciless critique he directed against Proudhon. For all his efforts to ground himself in reality, Proudhon remained an idealist and a metaphysician. His starting-point is the abstract idea of right. From right he proceeds to economic fact, while Marx, by contrast, advanced and proved the incontrovertible truth, confirmed by the entire past and present history of human society, nations, and states, that economic fact has always preceded legal and political right. The exposition and demonstration of that truth constitutes one of Marx's principal contributions to science (Bakunin 1990, 142).

This is why Bakunin described his politics in the 1872 letter to Spanish comrades as, "the anarchic system of Proudhon, expanded by us, developed and liberated from all its metaphysical, idealist, doctrinaire accoutrements, and squarely accepting matter in science, and social economy in history as the basis of all the subsequent developments" (Bakunin 2014).

On other occasions Bakunin revealed a more critical attitude to Marx's social theory. He had, as was previously noted, been careful to describe the materialist conception of history as true "from a relative point of view" and false when German communists viewed it "in an absolute manner, as the unique foundation and first source of all the other principles" (Bakunin 2016b). In the November-December 1872 drafts of The Knouto-Germanic Empire Bakunin complained that "the Marxist sociologists, men like Engels and Lassalle ... contend that the State is not at all the cause of the poverty, degradation, and servitude of the masses; that both the miserable condition of the masses and the despotic power of the State are, on the contrary, the effect of a more general underlying cause. In particular, we are told that they are both the products of an inevitable stage in the economic evolution of society" (Bakunin 2002, 309–10). He accepted "the inevitable linking of economic and political facts in history", but doubted "the inevitable process of economic facts in which, if one were to believe Mr. Marx, there must be sought to the exclusion of all other considerations the only cause of all of history's moral and intellectual phenomena" (ibid, 310–12).

A further illustration of this point can be found in Bakunin's unsent October 1872 letter to the editors of Liberty (La Liberté). In the letter he argued that Marx's focus on the economic factors that underpin the state led him to ignore that the state is a social structure that reproduces and maintains class divisions in order to perpetuate itself and its own power. Therefore the state will not, as Marx thought, peacefully wither away in a classless society. It must instead be violently destroyed during the social revolution. Bakunin wrote,

> The political State in every country, he says, is always the product and faithful reflection of its economic situation; to change the former, one has only to change the latter. This is the whole secret of political evolutions, according to Herr Marx. He pays no heed to other elements in history, such as the effect — obvious though it is — of political, judicial and religious institutions on the economic situation. He says that 'hardship produces political slavery — the State', but does not allow for the converse: 'Political slavery — the State — reproduces and maintains hardship as a condition of its existence, so that in order to destroy hardship the State must be destroyed' ...
>
> Herr Marx also utterly ignores one highly important element in the historical development of humanity, and that is the individual temperament and character of all races and peoples, which are themselves the product of a host of ethnographic, climatological and economic, as well as historical, causes but which, once established, exert a considerable influence over the destinies and even the development of a country's economic forces, outside and independent of its economic conditions. Among these elements and so to speak natural characteristics, there is one whose effect is absolutely crucial in the individual history of every people, and that is the intensity of the instinct of rebellion, and hence of liberty, with which it is endowed or which it has preserved (Bakunin 1973, 256).

Bakunin believed that Marx made the mistake of "taking only the strictly economic question into account" and that this led him to falsely predict that the social revolution would first emerge in countries where capitalism has reached its highest point of development, such as England or Germany. Bakunin instead predicted that the social revolution would not begin in Germany because an authoritarian and obedient temperament predominated there. The revolution would instead "come to it from outside, probably from southern Europe" where economic forces were less developed but the instinct for freedom and rebellion was more advanced (ibid, 257–58. Also see Bakunin 1990, 7–8).[3] In light of the 1917 Russian revolution, Bakunin was correct to predict

[3] Both Marx and Bakunin believed that biological races with different characteristics existed. This was a widespread false belief among biologists at the time. Importantly, Bakunin did not think that what he called moral characteristics, such as cowardice or a commitment to freedom, were biologically heritable and instead credited their transmission to socialisation and life experience. How this process of social development occurs is influenced by prenatal factors, but these generally have a smaller impact than the environment at an individual level. He wrote that, "natural and innate difference, small as it may be, is nevertheless positive and real: difference in temperament, in vital energy, in the predominance of one sense or one group of organic functions over others, difference in vivacity and natural capacities. We have tried to prove that vices as well as moral qualities—facts of individual and social consciousness—cannot be physically inherited, and that man cannot be physiologically predetermined toward evil, nor irrevocably rendered incapable of good. But we have never meant to deny that individual natures differ widely among themselves, that some of them are endowed to a greater extent than others with a capacity

that the social revolution would first emerge in the economically underdeveloped periphery, but his explanation for it in this letter was flawed and reflected his tendency to make sweeping generalisations about entire countries.[4]

It must also be very briefly noted that Bakunin is attacking a straw person, which to be fair is partly due to Bakunin's limited access to Marx's work.[5] Marx thought that the economic base "conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process generally" such that "specific forms of social consciousness" correspond to the economic base (Marx 1996, 160). But he also believed that elements of what he called the superstructure, such as religion and government, shape each other and the economic foundation of society in both minor and major ways. In his manuscripts and notebooks he was explicit that in a totality "mutual interaction takes place between the different moments" (Marx 1993, 100) and there is "the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another" (MECW 5, 53). This ontology underpinned an important statement that Marx made about the economic base in Capital Volume Three, which was first published in 1894 after both Bakunin and Marx had died. He clarified that the economic foundation is the "basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the specific form of state in each case. This does not prevent the same economic basis — the same in its major conditions — from displaying endless variations and gradations in its appearance, as the result of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting from outside, etc., and these can only be understood by analysing these empirically given conditions" (Marx 1991, 927–28).

Marx, in addition to this, thought that elements of the superstructure could, under the right circumstances, be the most influential component of society at certain points

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for a full human development. True, we believe that these natural differences are now quite exaggerated and that most of them should be attributed not to Nature but to the different education which has been allotted to each individual ... We have even recognized that in some exceptional cases, in men of genius or of great talent for example, as well as idiots or highly perverse natures, this influence of natural determination upon the development of the individual—a determination as inevitable as the influence of education and society—may be great." (Bakunin 1964, 153–54). To learn more about Marx's views on race see Paul 1981. For Bakunin see Bakunin 1964, 147–54; Bakunin 1970, 65–7; Bakunin 1989, 178–79.

[4] In the appendix to Statism and Anarchy Bakunin made the more plausible argument that the positive aspects of Russia's peasant communes, which were called the mir, could provide the basis for the emergence of anarchist socialist consciousness in the country. Importantly, he did not think this would occur automatically. He instead emphasised that an organisation of committed revolutionaries had to help forge links between both different peasant communes and between the peasantry and urban workers. He believed that a core goal of this organising should be revolutionaries persuading the peasantry to abandon what he regarded as the three main barriers to them developing anarchist socialist consciousness: patriarchy and faith in the Tsar, alongside the authoritarian tendency of the mir to override individual liberties, be a tool of the state, and a servant of rich peasants (Bakunin 1990, 198–217).

[5] The following interpretation is indebted to conversations with Paul Raekstad and unpublished drafts he has shown me, alongside my study of Mészáros 2011 and Marx himself.

in time. In a footnote that Marx added to the 1872–75 French edition of Capital Volume One he outlined the base/superstructure metaphor and then wrote,

> In the opinion of the German-American publication this is all very true for our own times, in which material interests are preponderant, but not for the Middle Ages, dominated by Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, dominated by politics. In the first place, it strikes us as odd that anyone should suppose that these well-worn phrases about the Middle Ages and the ancient world were unknown to anyone else. One thing is clear: the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor could the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the manner in which they gained their livelihood which explains why in one case politics, in the other case Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest, one needs no more than a slight acquaintance with, for example, the history of the Roman Republic, to be aware that its secret history is the history of landed property. And then there is Don Quixote, who long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society (Marx 1990, 175–76n35).

For Marx features of the economic base ultimately "explains" why elements of the superstructure play "the chief part" at a societal level. This is due to the parameters that are established by the economic foundation's enabling and constraining conditions. The economic base enables the superstructure to take various forms through the production and distribution of goods and services that any social structure needs to function or exist over time, such as agriculture sustaining the population of cities and producing the food necessary to feed large armies. If this amount of food was not being consistently produced, then it would not be possible to live in cities like Rome or form Roman legions. The economic base also constrains or imposes limits on the possible forms that the superstructure can take, such as the class divisions of slavery only being compatible with certain kinds of government that enforce slavery and give power to slave owners, like the citizen democracy of Ancient Athens or the aristocratic Senate in the Roman republic's mixed constitution. But, despite having an important explanatory role, the economic base does not itself play "the chief part" at a societal level over extended periods of time.

Importantly, Marx thought that one of the ways elements of the superstructure can play a chief part is by fundamentally altering the economic base in order to realise possibilities that are imminent in current productive forces (technology, skills, means of production etc), but cannot be fulfilled under the old relations of production that constrain their exercise (Marx 1996, 160; Raekstad 2022, 199–204). In Capital Volume One he documented the central role of the state, alongside economic factors like market incentives and new machinery, in the establishment of capitalism in England. In particular he emphasised acts of state violence that created and maintained a class of

propertyless wage labourers, such as the dissolution of the monasteries, the enclosure acts, and laws that criminalised vagabonds (Marx 1990, 382, 873–926). He concluded from an assessment of the empirical evidence that, in the history of the emergence of capitalism, "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short force, play the greatest part" (ibid, 874). Bakunin's summary and critique of Marx's social theory is therefore based on a misinterpretation of his ideas. I shall now turn to documenting Marx's influence on the early anarchist movement in general.

Marx in the Early Anarchist Movement

Initially members of the International heard of Marx and Engels due to their role in the organisation, but generally had a limited knowledge of what these two men thought beyond the broad socialist principles that Marx outlined in texts like the Inaugural Address and Rules of the International (MECW 20, 5–16). Such brief contributions were later joined by longer articles and pamphlets about the conflict in the organisation, such as the 1872 Fictitious Splits in the International or the 1872 resolutions of the Hague Congress. These texts were largely concerned with endorsing state socialist strategies and falsely accusing Bakunin and his allies of trying to take over the International and impose their anarchist programme onto it (MECW 23, 79–123; 243–53; 454–580). It should be assumed that Bakunin discussed Marx's social theory in conversations with his comrades. Unfortunately these were usually not recorded in writing and have been lost to history. The majority of texts where Bakunin praised Marx's Capital or materialist conception of history were unpublished and only known to a select few like his publisher and comrade James Guillaume. The main exception to this was Bakunin's influential critique of Mazzini, which was published in Italy on 16 August 1871 and Belgium on 18 August (Ravindranathan, 121–24). When Bakunin did discuss Marx's social theories in letters to Spanish and Italian radicals he assumed the ignorance of his reader.

Such ignorance of Marx and Engels' philosophical and social scientific work was common among European socialists at the time due to how many texts were either unpublished notebooks or drafts, out of print, or in print but only available in one or a few languages. For example, at a party held after the 1865 London conference of the International Marx informed the French mutualist delegates Tolain and Fribourg that he had thrashed Proudhon in his book The Poverty of Philosophy, which the Frenchmen had never heard of before, let alone read (Archer 1997, 61, 76n6). This is unsurprising since the polemic only had a print run of eight hundred copies and received very little attention (McLellan 1973, 165–66).[6] A few attempts were made to spread

[6] Another attendee of the 1865 London conference, the mutualist and later collectivist César De Paepe, used Marx's critique of Proudhon in polemics with anti-collectivist mutualists. In 1868 he wrote, "thanks to a dialectics put in the service of a method more often metaphysical than scientific (which it is necessary to avoid confusing with the historical and objective method of Karl Marx), Proudhon has

Marx's ideas through lectures but these had, by their very nature, a limited impact. In 1865 Marx gave a series of lectures on the economics of wages and the importance of trade union struggle to members of the International's general council in London. The contents of these lectures only reached a wider audience in 1898, when they were published in German and English under the title Value, Price and Profit (MECW 20, 101–49, 466-67n87). To my knowledge the first time members of the International came into contact with Marx's theory of history was at the 1867 Lausanne congress. During it the tailor Johann Georg Eccarius, who was a comrade of Marx and Engels, gave a nearly two hour talk on the materialist conception of history that received a thunderous round of applause by the attending delegates. The congress was attended by some future anarchists like Guillaume, but crucially occurred prior to Bakunin joining the organisation and the formation of the Spanish and Italian sections of the International (Archer 1997, 109n86).

As state socialist parties were formed and expanded between the 1860s and 1890s, certain old and new theoretical works of Marx and Engels became readily available to a large audience, most notably The Manifesto the Communist Party, the three volumes of Capital, Anti-Duhring, and The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (Steenson 1991; Musto 2008). Yet other texts that are essential for understanding Marx's social theory, such as Marx and Engels' 1845–6 rough book draft that was later dubbed The German Ideology, were not publicly known until the 1920s onwards. The limited access to Marx's complete works went alongside popularisations of his ideas, which were written by other authors like Kaul Kautsky, being more widely read than Marx himself (Bonnell 2002; Haupt 1986, 70; Levy 1999, 35). This shifting literary context is essential to keep in mind when reading anarchist authors on Marx.

Malatesta recalled that in Italy during the early 1870s, "though none of us had read Marx, we were still too Marxist" due to the influence of Bakunin's views on political economy and history (Malatesta 2015, 198–99). This influence is hinted at by the fact that the 1873 congress of the Italian section declared itself both materialist

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discovered in the social world some laws that observation confirms more from day to day; it is, however, incontestable that hypothesis still plays an infinitely more considerable role in the works of that thinker and that often he has concluded a priori or from insufficient observations: witness the conclusions of his last works relative to the social role of strikes and trades-unions, and those relative to the tendencies of modern production towards association and thus towards the collective appropriation of land and the large instruments of labor, two phenomena of which Proudhon has misunderstood the immense scope from the point of view of the organization of the future, and that he condemned even in the name of reason and logic, while Marx, already well before 1848, in the name of observation and history, considers them the two principal elements of the solution of the social problem. The majority of the writers of Liberté have made the defects of Proudhon their own by sacrificing, so to speak absolutely, his scientific side" (De Paepe 2014). It is unclear how De Paepe, who was six when The Poverty of Philosophy was published, acquired knowledge of Marx's critique of Proudhon. He may have found an old copy of the book. Or perhaps he learnt this information from conversations with Marx and Eccarius at the conference and Marx's critical obituary of Proudhon, which was published in February 1865 within Der Social-Demokrat (MECW 20, 26–33).

and anarchist (Eckhardt 2016, 388). One of the key members of the Italian anarchist movement at the time was Carlo Cafiero. He arrived in Italy as an envoy of Marx and Engels but soon discovered that the accusations that they had made against local collectivists, who were associates of Bakunin, were not true (Eckhardt 2016, 121–34; Ravindranathan 1988, 114–19). In 1871 Cafiero translated Marx's The Civil War in France, which was a defence of the Paris Commune publicly credited to every member of the International's general council (Steenson 1991, 113, 220; MECW 22, 309, 355). A copy of the document had been personally sent to Cafiero by Engels around June 1871, alongside the request in early July that he "arrange for an Italian translation to be published" (MECW 44, 161).

Cafiero remained a public defender of the general council until May 1872. That month he was persuaded by Carmelo Palladino, Alberto Tucci, and Malatesta to visit Bakunin in Switzerland and discover for himself if what Engels said about Bakunin was true or not. He arrived at Bakunin's residence on 20 May and the two promptly became comrades and realised their agreement on matters of principle. During this four week visit Cafiero wrote an angry letter to Engels, which he read aloud to Bakunin while he was composing it. In the letter he treated the decades old ideas of the Communist Manifesto, which he had only recently read for the first time despite his friendship with Engels, as the key to revealing the true meaning behind Marx and Engels' current advocacy of the conquest of political power. Cafiero was especially offended by the Manifesto's advocacy of centralised state ownership and management of the economy through industrial and agricultural armies. Marx and Engels' revision of some of these ideas in response to the lessons of the Paris Commune appears to have been ignored. This is partly because the preface to the 1872 German edition of the Manifesto, which claimed that the proposals at the end of Section II "would, in many respects, be very differently worded today", was not written until June 24 (MECW 23, 174–5). Another factor is that Engels had allegedly claimed in a letter to Cafiero, which has not survived, that Italy needed a "very strong government" to civilise it through state education programs and the repression of organised crime. He also allegedly claimed that Bismarck and the Italian King Victor Emanuel II had helped the future social revolution by pushing for political centralisation (Eckhardt 2016, 223–26, 519n175; Ravindranathan 1988, 167–73).[7]

[7] It is not known how Cafiero first read the Communist Manifesto. One obvious source is Bakunin, who owned a German copy and his own Russian translation of it. Cafiero arrived at Bakunin's on 20 May 1872 and then read aloud to Bakunin the first part of his letter to Engels on 31 May and the rest on 3 June. It was then sent to Engels on 19 June from Milan, one day after he had left Switzerland (Eckhardt 2016, 223–25). This was enough time in which to read the Manifesto, but I do not know if Cafiero had the required language skills. He definitely read Italian, English, and French to a high level. I have been unable to find evidence that he read German or Russian. This is indirectly supported by the fact that he first read Marx's Capital in its French translation and not the German original. Bakunin could have read out the Manifesto to Cafiero by translating it in real time as he spoke, but there is no direct evidence that this happened. It has been suggested that the edition of the Manifesto that Cafiero read was the December 1871 English edition published by the American paper Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly under

This rejection of Marx and Engels' views on revolutionary strategy did not lead Cafiero to reject every idea that they proposed. When the Italian was imprisoned in 1877 for organising an unsuccessful armed insurrection, he used his time behind bars to read the French edition of Capital Volume One, which had been sent to him by Guillaume. Cafiero ended up liking the book so much that he wrote a summary of it. This summary was then published in 1879 (Pernicone 1993, 135; Léonard 2018, 376–77). In the introduction Cafiero declared that Marx's Capital "represents the new truth, which demolishes, crushes, and scatters to the winds an entire centuries-old edifice of errors and lies" (Quoted in Crossin 2025). He then explained that he had been motivated to write a summary by the desire to make Capital well known in Italy and accessible to a large audience. This labour was appreciated by Marx himself, who praised Cafiero's work in a letter and said it was superior to other summaries he had read (Cafiero 2018; MECW 45, 365–66).

The extent to which Cafiero absorbed Marx's economic theory is revealed in many small moments scattered throughout his work. For example, he wrote in 1879 that the amount of small property holders were decreasing in Italy because the country had "set course with more alacrity down the path, which all modern nations must necessarily travel; the path that leads to capitalist accumulation, which has reached that classic form in England, which Italy wishes to reach along with all other modern nations" (Cafiero 2018). Later, in 1881, he published a series of articles on human history, capitalism, anarchist communism, and social revolution. Throughout he explicitly referenced and quoted Marx's Capital when explaining aspects of capitalism like the division of labour, the role of machinery and large-scale co-operation in production, and how capitalism was established through force (Cafiero 2012, 7, 25–7, 52–3, 57).

Importantly, Cafiero was not the only anarchist to play a key role in the translation and dissemination of Marx and Engels' ideas. A selection of examples, which is by no means exhaustive, is as follows:

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the title German Communism – Manifesto of the German Communist Party. This is because it would explain why Cafiero referred to the originally titled Manifesto of the Communist Party as the "Manifesto of the German Communist Party" in the letter (Eckhardt 2016, 224, 518n167). Engels had mentioned the publication of this translation in a 15 February 1872 letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht (MECW 44, 319). On 17 March Engels complained to Friedrich Sorge, who lived in the United States, about the quality of the recent translations and asked him to send over "50 copies of the issue of Woodhull & Claflin's which contains the translation of the Communist Manifesto, and 50–100 of the issues of the Socialiste with the French translation" (ibid, 343, 643n440). Engels could have forwarded one of these new copies, or the previous one he owned, to Cafiero. Previously when Engels had sent documents to Cafiero he wrote a letter informing him that they were on their way (ibid, 171). No such letter for the Manifesto has been found. If Engels sent Cafiero a copy it was probably attached to the lost letter that was written between 29 February and 9 March (Eckhardt 2016, 225). It should also be kept in mind that Bakunin referred to the Manifesto as "the famous manifesto of the German Communists" in the unsent October 1872 letter to the editors of La Liberté and his 1873 book Statism and Anarchy (Bakunin 1973, 252; Bakunin 1990, 146). As a result, Bakunin could potentially have also been the reason why Cafiero used this phrase.

- Prior to becoming an anarchist in late 1882, the German social democrat Johann Most read Capital while he was in prison for political activism and published a sixty page summary of it in 1873. This was the first popularisation of the text and served as an introduction to many (Goyens 2025, 57–8, 93–4). Marx had serious issues with Most's pamphlet and made a number of substantial changes to the second edition that was released in 1876. As he explained in a letter, "shall send you a copy of the Most, corrected by me, forthwith; didn't put my name to it because I should then have had to make even more alterations (I had to delete the bits about value, money, wages and much else, and substitute things of my own)" (MECW 45, 125. Also see ibid, 118, 120).

- In 1889 the New York anarchist paper Truth (Varhayt) published a serialized translation of Capital into Yiddish. Unfortunately this work was cut short by financial troubles and the paper ceased publication after four months. From 1913 onwards the Kropotkin Literary Society published Yiddish translations of Marx (Zimmer 2015, 23, 36).

- In 1891 the anarchist Pietro Gori published the first complete (aside from the preamble) Italian translation of the Communist Manifesto, which featured a foreword by him (Musto 2008, 451–52). In a letter Engels complained about Gori's foreword but did not explain why he disliked it (MECW 49, 159).

- In the early 1900s a Tokyo based Chinese anarchist group, which included the important anarchist feminist theorist He-Yin Zhen, published the earliest Chinese translations of large parts of the Communist Manifesto and other Marxist texts, including an excerpt of Engel's The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State. Their translation of the 1888 preface to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto featured a foreword by the anarchist Liu Shipei. In it he critiqued Marx and Engels' embrace of electoral politics, whilst praising the work as essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the development of European capitalism and the importance of class struggle in history (Zarrow 1990, 102–4).

After Marx's death in March 1883 the anarchist paper The Rebel (Le Révolté), published an obituary that contained both criticism and praise of the author. It claimed that Marx's "death is a great loss for the science of sociology" (Le Révolté, 1883). This was because,

> Marx possessed mastery of the dialectical method, which he showed in all his attacks on the economists of the bourgeois school. In spite of the differences of opinion about his fundamental work, Capital, in which many people do not see original ideas – for example, the law of wages and value being found with Ricardo and other English economists – it must be admitted that no one has surpassed Marx in erudition, critique and scientific

> argumentation, either in his polemics with the bourgeois economist schools or in his assertion of socialist ideas (Le Révolté, 1883).

At the time The Rebel was one of the most influential anarchist papers in the world. It had been founded by Kropotkin, Francois Dumartheray and Georges Herzig in February 1879 and was later, from May onwards, financially supported by Élisée Reclus. At first the main writer for the paper was Kropotkin. This abruptly ended when he was arrested in late December 1882 and then, after a brief trial, imprisoned in January 1883. His replacement, Jean Grave, did not take over editing the paper until the end of the year. As a result it is unclear who wrote the obituary to Marx, but it was probably a joint effort by Dumartheray and Herzig (Kropotkin 1989b, 389–95; Bantman 2021, 25–6, 29–30; Cahm 1989, 117–19, 185–90, 328n38).

Judging by other sources it is apparent that Kropotkin would have written a very different obituary if he had the chance. On multiple occasions Kropotkin, who for context was a geographer and natural scientist that specialised in the study of glaciers and evidence for the ice age (Ivanova and Markin, 2008), was very dismissive of the scientific quality of Marx's work. In 1895 he complained that "while economic ideas are gaining in depth, even in the bourgeois science, under the whip of socialistic criticism, and new questions and new perceptions are surging forward – as it always happens with science under the official seal, the science of the party is motionless. It is arrested at the 'Communist Manifesto,' which dates fifty years back, and at Marx's 'Capital', which, whatever may be said of it, has had its day" (Kropotkin 2019). In the 1913 edition of Modern Science and Anarchy Kropotkin attacked Marxism's dialectical method, which he incorrectly believed consisted in shoving events into a preconceived thesis/anti-thesis/synthesis formula, as antiquated in comparison to the inductive-deductive method of the natural sciences (Kropotkin 2018, 110–11, 126–28, 180–82). The Russian edition of Kropotkin's autobiography contained perhaps his most hostile remarks on the subject. He wrote,

> I read this book while I was still in Petersburg, where it appeared in 1872 in German Lopatin's translation. Even then I very much disliked the pretentiousness of the book as well as its unscientific character — the theory of value, for example, is not demonstrated scientifically but has to be taken on faith — and its indulgence in scientific jargon. Marx's excursions into the realm of numerical expressions and algebraic formulae were comical: they demonstrate his utter inability to think concretely, in quantitative terms, and Nicholas Tsinger (an astronomer) and I had a good laugh over his 'formulae', which he sets out so pretentiously without even suspecting how amusing they are to a mathematician accustomed to the idea of units of measurement. Highly comical as well is his penchant for expressing himself in formulae where formulae express nothing (Kropotkin 1995b, 220–21).

This and other similarly biting criticisms went alongside Kropotkin acknowledging the generally positive reception that Capital had within the early anarchist movement. He claimed that at the time the book "was greeted sympathetically by everyone as a powerful weapon with which to strike at the contemporary bourgeois organization of society" and arouse "socialist thought" (ibid, 220). In particular they admired Marx for "his principal attention to the economic forms of life" and viewed him as a fellow socialist "who placed the struggle on its true ... economic foundations" and thereby helped to counteract bourgeois radicals who focused on merely changing the form of the state. These strengths, in the opinion of Kropotkin, led anarchists at the time to incorrectly pass "over all the defects in his theory" and resolve "not to attack it" (ibid, 220–22).

An early anarchist that Kropotkin may have had in mind was the Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons, who was executed by the American government in November 1887. He first became a state socialist in the 1870s, joined the Social Democratic Working Men's Party of North America, and ran for political office. After realising the ineffectiveness of electoral politics, he switched to anarchism around 1880. Despite this change of strategy he continued to be influenced by Marx and Engels, who were two of the first socialist theorists he read (Avrich 1984, 15–55). In 1886 Parsons recommended that people who find the vision of an anarchist society "merely sentimental or Utopian" should study "the operation of our capitalistic system, as outlined by Marx and others" (Parsons 2003, 107). In 1887 he wrote a short history of capitalism in the United States and Europe that quoted twenty seven pages worth of material from the Communist Manifesto and Capital Volume One (ibid, 22–48). In the essay he claimed that the class struggle between capitalists and proletarians "arises from and is inherent in the wage system. How that system operates in minutia, in detail; how it effects the laborer and the capitalist has been clearly and scientifically formulated by Karl Marx in his work entitled 'Capital,' a chapter from which is here quoted" (ibid, 22).

Economic Determinism in the Early Anarchist Movement

One of the main aspects of Marxist social theory that certain anarchists adopted was historical materialism. For example, Rudolf Rocker claimed that in London during the 1880s, "the Jewish anarchists at that time and for some time after accepted the idea of economic materialism" and "the Marxist conception of history" (Rocker 2005, 58). In popular works at the time Marx's theory of history tended to be rendered in an economically deterministic manner.[8] This included ones written by anarchists. In 1884 Malatesta argued that, "as man's primary need and the essential prerequisite of

[8] Engels privately complained about this distortion of his and Marx's ideas in a few letters. See MECW 49, 34–6, 59–63, 197; MECW 50, 163–65, 264–67.

existence is that he is able to eat, it is only natural that the character of a society is determined primarily by the manner in which man secures the means of survival, how wealth is produced and distributed... Economic factors dominate every aspect of the life of society" (Malatesta 2014, 19). He asserted that, "the greatest discovery of this century was made by the International when it proclaimed that the economic question is fundamental in Sociology, and that other matters—political, religious, etc.—are merely its reflections, perhaps even the shadows it casts ... Economic inequality is the source of all moral, intellectual, political, etc. inequalities" (ibid, 23–4).

Albert Parsons similarly explained in 1887 that,

> The economic regulates and controls the social status of man; the mode and manner of procuring our livelihood affects our whole life; the all-pervading cause is economic, not political; moral or religious; and social institutions of every kind and degree result from, grow out of, and are created by the economic or industrial regulations of society. Every human being, consciously or unconsciously, is affected and controlled by it in what they think, or say, or do. There is no escape, no evasion from its consequences. It is logic. It is cause and effect. Evil exists on every hand; the well-disposed, philanthropic, and generous, and the good, seek relief from these evil influences by moral suasion, by self-denial, by religion, by politics, etc., etc., but in vain, in vain! The evils remain, and not only remain, but grow worse and worse. Why, if the fountain is corrupt, can the stream be pure? If the cause remains, must not the effects follow? Jails, judges and executioners, police, armies and navies, pestilence, misery and ignorance and debauchery, and evils of all kinds of high and low degree, all flow from one fountain. That flowing fountain of human woe is the economic or industrial subjection and enslavement of man to man (Parsons 2003, 97).

By the 1890s Malatesta had shifted his beliefs and no longer endorsed economic determinism. He now connected strategic mistakes that the early anarchist movement in Italy had made to their absorption of Marxist theory. Between the 1870s and 1880s Italian anarchists had generally viewed the struggle for immediate improvements, such as strikes for higher wages, as ineffective and ultimately pointless. These anarchists instead focused their energies on attempting to ignite a mass working class uprising by engaging in immediate armed struggle. This strategy, which proved unsuccessful and isolated anarchists from other workers, was grounded in economic determinism, an almost fatalistic belief in an imminent revolution in response to worsening economic conditions, and the iron law of wages (Baker 2023, 175–210; Levy 2018, 215; Malatesta 2016, 299–301, 319, 336; Zimmer 2015, 28–9, 60).

The so-called iron law held that real wages under capitalism would always tend toward the amount of money required to secure the subsistence of the worker because any increase in wages that workers won through struggle would be cancelled out by

increases in the supply of labour and the cost of living (Wolff 2014). It was popularised among socialists by Ferdinand Lassalle and featured in the 1875 Gotha programme of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, which remained in place until the new Erfurt programme was drawn up in 1891 (SAP 1875; Steenson 1991, 56, 70–73). An indication of how widespread this idea was can be seen in the fact that it was endorsed by the influential Marxist Jules Guesde of the French Workers' Party in the 1880s (ibid, 121, 129. Also see Avrich 1984, 21–4; Rocker 2005, 58–9). The result was that the iron law of wages became associated with Marxism in the public eye, despite the fact that Marx himself rejected it. Part of why this occurred is that Marx's objections to the idea in Critique of the Gotha Programme (Marx 1991, 218–20) and Value, Price, and Profit (MECW 20, 103–49) were not published until 1891 and 1898 respectively.

Malatesta reflected in September 1897, "our mistakes, shared by all the older schools of revolutionaries, are in large measure something we owe to Marxist theory, of which all us anarchists were once upon a time more consistent or even more orthodox advocates than those who professed to be Marxists and, perhaps, than Marx himself, and we have been discarding those mistakes as we have been shrugging of marxism's mistakes" (Malatesta 2016, 302). He later said in an October interview, "we, who had always been, right from the outset, in conflict with the marxist party, were in many respects more marxist than those who professed to be such. Thus for instance, we accepted marxism's inert fatalism, the law of wages made fashionable by Lassalle and other postulates. This is why we were convinced of the impossibility and pointlessness of any reform and improvement of the proletariat's conditions under a capitalist regime" (ibid, 319. Also see ibid, 333, 336).

If by Marxism Malatesta meant a belief in economic determinism then he is, in this respect, entirely correct to say that the early Italian anarchist movement were more Marxist than Marx! One of the sources for these theories was, as Malatesta later noted, Bakunin (Malatesta 2015, 198–99). In 1882 Cafiero and Reclus published a pamphlet called God and the State, which was taken from the drafts of Bakunin's Knouto-Germanic Empire. This pamphlet was Bakunin's most widely read work. It opened with Bakunin declaring that materialism is correct and "the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history" (Bakunin 1970, 9). Unfortunately, Cafiero and Reclus did not include the preceding paragraphs, where Bakunin called this principle true "from a relative point of view" and false when "posited in an absolute manner, as the unique foundation and first source of all the other principles" (Bakunin 2016b).[9] Two years after the publication of God and

[9] It is unclear why this is the case. In the preface they claim that "the present memoir, 'God and the State,' is really a fragment of a letter or report. Composed in the same manner as most of Bakunin's other writings, it has the same literary fault, lack of proportion; moreover it breaks off abruptly: we have searched in vain to discover the end of the manuscript" (Bakunin 1970, 6). But this account was later contradicted by Guillaume, who had originally provided Reclus with the relevant manuscripts. He complained in 1908, "that last assertion is incomprehensible to me, for the end of the manuscript (pages 248–340) was found, along with the part published by Reclus and Cafiero, in the case passed by me to

the State Malatesta repeated Bakunin's reflection formulation, which is a metaphor that lends itself to highly deterministic interpretations in which non-economic factors are merely the passive mirror image of the economy (Malatesta 2014, 23–4). The later drafts and unsent letter where Bakunin argued that non-economic factors significantly shape society in general and the economy in particular were not publicly available until 1910, when volume four of Bakunin's collected works was published in French (Bakunin 1910, 378–79, 455–59).

Marx in the Later Anarchist Movement

In the early twentieth century many anarchists rejected the economically deterministic version of Marxist social theory that had influenced significant segments of the anarchist movement in the 1870s and 1880s (Cherkezishvili 1902, 67–77; Kropotkin 2018, 499–500; Rocker 1925; Rocker 1937, 23–41; Voline 2019). A curious feature of these critiques is that they often contain points that Marx himself agreed with or are, at least, much closer to his perspective than crude economic determinism. A typical example can be found in the correspondence of the Italian anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti. He wrote in June 1927, "I belong to the anty-marxist socialist who affirm that though economy be a base of life it is not the only, and maybe neither the greatest of the historical factor" (Sacco and Vanzetti 1997, 287). The relevant footnote in Capital appears to have escaped him.

In 1910 the American anarchist Voltairine De Cleyre complained that "the so-called Materialist Conception of History, the modern Socialists, and a positive majority of Anarchists would have us look upon the world of ideas, —shifting, unreal reflections, having naught to do in the determination of Man's life, but so many mirror appearances of certain material relations, wholly powerless to act upon the course of material things" (De Cleyre 2005, 114). In response she argued that,

> against the accepted formula of modern Materialism, "Men are what circumstances make them," I set the opposing declaration, "Circumstances are what men make them"; and I contend that both these things are true up to the point where the combating powers are equalized, or one is overthrown. In other words, my conception of mind, or character, is not that it is a powerless reflection of a momentary condition of stuff and form, but an active modifying agent, reacting on its environment and transforming

Élisée Reclus; that case also contained pages 139–148, which Reclus and Cafiero have not included, a proof of pages 139–148, and a proof of pages 149–210; the second of these proofs bore corrections of style and some deletions in the hand of Reclus and in one other hand; I find it still more difficult to explain, in view of that circumstance, that the editors of 1882 could have called this piece "a fragment from a letter or report." This little literary artifice — for that is probably what it is — was not necessary to make the reader appreciate the high value of those pages" (Guillaume, 2016).

> circumstances, sometimes slightly, sometimes greatly, sometimes, though not often, entirely (ibid, 115).

In so doing De Cleyre was actually aligning herself with Marx. In 1845 he critiqued previous forms of materialism for rendering people as the mere mechanical product of their environment and ignoring what he called the active side, namely the ability of people to simultaneously change themselves and circumstances through activity (Marx 1992, 421–23). He and Engels then claimed in their 1845/6 book manuscript that "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" since inherited circumstances set the initial parameters for the life of a generation and condition them accordingly, but are also themselves "modified by the new generation" (MECW 5, 54. Also see ibid, 50; Marx 1996, 32).

In parallel to these developments, other anarchists continued to use Marx for anarchist ends. One of these was the Spanish anarchist José Prat. Through his paper Workers' Solidarity (Solidaridad Obrera [Gijón]) he spread syndicalist ideas and thereby helped to lay the foundation for the formation of the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in 1910. As part of this he framed syndicalism as an inevitable response to contemporary economic relations and even proposed that authority was the result of the system of production alone. Some articles in the paper were unattributed summaries of Marx's Capital, such as the section on the reserve army of labour (Yeoman 2020, 209–210, 255n104). Such openness to non-anarchist theory was embodied in the libraries of anarchist cultural centres in Spain, which usually contained works by Marxist and bourgeois authors (Ealham 2015, 51–2).

Firmly anti-Marxist anarchists could be extremely critical of anarchists who used Marxist theory. For example, in 1925 Emilio López Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán endorsed, "the purging from anarchism of all traces of Marxism which have persisted since its origins or have been introduced by syndicalism. The abolition of all economic dogmas which represent a form of preliminary legislation of the future and the conception of Anarchism as a doctrine of working-class origin and not as a scientific discovery and the monopoly of philosophers" (Quoted in Garner 2016, 175). Other anarchists who strongly disagreed with Marx and Engels' social theory still drew from their work. In 1938 Rocker, who rejected historical materialism, cited Marx's Capital during his summary of the industrial revolution and the emergence of the modern proletariat (Rocker 2004, 21).

In 1921 Fabbri reflected on the history of anarchism's relationship to Marxist social theory at length. He explained,

> We are not Marxists. But it would be wrong to take Marxism as a term of differentiation between anarchism and socialism. One could theoretically, strictly speaking, be an anarchist and a Marxist, and vice-versa be an anti-anarchist socialist and not a Marxist. Of course, by Marxism we mean the complex of theories developed by Marx in his works (historical materialism, class struggle, capitalist concentration, surplus value, etc.), and not

> the practical political stances of the second period of his activity, carried out largely to combat the anarchist current of the International. In fact, theoretically, in the ideas of the various socialist and anarchist writers, there has not always been an absolute incompatibility between anarchism and Marxism.
>
> Many have reproduced the passage in which Marx, in 1872, accepted a socialist definition of anarchy. On the other hand, Bakunin repeatedly claimed to be a follower of the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism; and so the first vulgarizers of Marxism in Italy were anarchists... As Malatesta noted in a polemic in 1897, almost all anarchist literature until around 1894 was impregnated with Marxism. Little by little our movement and our propaganda (at least for the most part, because some tendency of this kind is still manifesting here and there) lost this character; and rightly in our opinion, for the reasons we will tell later. But what we have mentioned is no less valid in showing how wrong it is to speak of Marxism to characterize an antithesis of anarchism ... We, we repeat, are not Marxists, though anarchism at its rise, not in practice but in theoretical motivations, was almost completely so (Fabbri 2020).

For Fabbri "historical materialism" offered a one-sided and partial explanation that was "accurate in a relative and contingent sense, and not in an absolute way, for all times and places" (ibid). This was because,

> the truth contained in the materialistic conception of history is a truth, not the whole truth; and Marxists instead fall into the error of subordinating all the other factors to the economic factor, not only admitting the greater importance of the latter in certain historical periods (such as, for example, that of industrial civilization), but even making it the sole engine of history, and seeing in all the other social factors derivations, consequences, facts in turn determined by the economic fact. It is a historical error, since, if in every event the economic factor has its influence, not all historical events are determined mainly by the economic factor or by it alone; in some, indeed, it is subordinated to factors of another kind (ibid).

Interestingly he thought this one sidedness could be credited "a little to Marx and especially to Engels, and much more to the Marxists who came later" (ibid). He believed that such one-sided economic determinism was not only empirically false. It also led to socialists ignoring that oppressive social structures like the patriarchal family and the state have their own mechanisms of reproduction and will not disappear by themselves as a consequence of changes to the economic structure of society. They must instead be consciously and deliberately abolished. To quote Fabbri,

> by accustoming the socialist masses and the revolutionaries to the idea that, once wage-labor is abolished and property is socialized, all struggle is over and injustice and oppression deriving from other causes that are not only economic are also eliminated, it will happen that these causes are left standing and the revolution turns out incomplete, unprepared to solve all other problems of the complex social question. Whatever Engels has said, it is not at all true that religion, the family and the state, for example, are institutions that will disappear or transform themselves as a consequence of economic changes. The revolution, with different means depending on the nature of those institutions, must take charge of them directly, so that they do not become obstacles, hearths of reaction and perhaps a starting point for the reconstruction of the economic privilege demolished by the revolution (ibid).

Conclusion

The relationship between anarchism and Marxism is far more complex and nuanced than it is sometimes presented to be. Anarchists were always critical of Marxism, especially its strategies, but this criticism co-existed with a significant number of anarchists drawing upon Marxist social theory to complement their anarchist ideas. This had both positive and negative effects on the movement. The intricate understanding of capitalism that anarchists derived from reading Marx or summaries of his ideas, often went alongside the adoption of an economically deterministic version of historical materialism that was widespread at the time. This social theory was empirically false, contributed to strategic errors, and derived from an incorrect interpretation of Marx. An amusing consequence of this is that anarchist critiques of historical materialism contained some points that Marx himself agreed with. This included: the interplay between structure and agency; the economic structure and other parts of society, which Marx termed the superstructure, reciprocally shaping each other in minor and major ways; elements of what Marx called the superstructure playing the chief part at a societal level under the right circumstances; and this chief part sometimes involving the fundamental transformation of the economic base. When these anarchists thought they were moving away from Marx they were, on these very specific points and not other ones they made, actually moving towards him.

The fact that anarchists in the past drew upon Marxism does not mean or entail that anarchists in the present should do the same. The reason why modern anarchists should read Marx and Engels is the same as why they should read historical anarchist theory. Yes it contains faults and limitations, was a product of its time, and drew upon empirical evidence and scientific theories that are now severely out dated. But it also features valuable insights and thought provoking ideas. Although modern anarchists have nothing valuable to learn from Marx's endorsement of electoral politics or his

straw person of Bakunin's ideas, they can gain something (even if they disagree with it) from studying Marx's critique of political economy (Heinrich 2004), dialectical method (Ollman 2003), and analysis of how market forces restrict the freedom of the individual through impersonal domination (Raekstad 2022). Modern anarchists, unlike our predecessors, have access to the collected works of Marx and Engels and MEGA2, which is the second version of the Marx and Engels complete works and is still undergoing publication. We can also study the latest academic scholarship on Marx, which has revealed serious problems with previous orthodox interpretations of the thinker. This wealth of material makes it possible to develop an understanding of Marx on his own terms and in his own context, rather than see him through the distorted lens provided by the likes of Kautsky, Plekhanov, and Stalin.

Importantly, I do not believe that anarchists should merely repeat old ideas from the past. I instead hold that we must synthesise and build upon the best ideas that have been developed by various social movements of the oppressed and exploited. This includes, but is not limited to, anarchism, Marxism, feminism, the black radical tradition, and the Zapatistas. These ideas must be complemented by the latest advances in the natural and social sciences and be firmly grounded in a deep knowledge of global history and pre-history. The result will be a body of theory that does not treat old books like scripture and instead goes far beyond them. In this respect I agree with Engels, who is purported to have said in 1893 that he "would prefer the Russians — and everybody else too — to stop fishing around for quotations from Marx and Engels and begin thinking instead in the way that Marx would have thought in their position. If the word Marxist has any right to exist, it is only in that meaning" (Quoted in Haupt 1986, 18). The anarchist Kropotkin likewise wished in 1902 that Marxists would update their theories in response to empirical evidence, "rely less upon abstract formulae", and instead "try to imitate their teacher in his analysis of concrete economical phenomena" (Kropotkin 1902, 163). Such work will not be easy, but the most worthwhile things in life rarely are.

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Endnotes

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