The spirit of utopia

"Communism is the positive abolition of private property . . ." wrote Marx over a century ago. By this he did not mean merely that the relations of production would be changed in that capitalists would no longer own and control the means of production. The state or the people would not own anything. In fact nobody would own anything. The very notion of ownership would not even exist. Why? Because the conditions in which the notions of "ownership" and "private property" could be applicable would have been overcome. A framework in which 'private' versus 'public', inequality vies with equality and ownership struggles with non-ownership would have been superseded.

Thus revolution reaches far beyond the removal of private property in the external reality. It requires the abolition of private property and its ramifications in our "internal realities", that is, intrapsychically, and in our interpersonal relations. Revolutionaries must not only smash the external state structure, but must overcome the enormous effects on their own as well as others' being of their socialisation since birth. Women's liberationists are aware of this: How can a revolutionary eulogize workers' control during the day and beat his wife up at night? The overcoming of external oppression can have no meaning without the correlative resolution of its counterpart in oppressive personal relationships. The people of a new society would no longer see themselves and others as manipulable objects.

When society is viewed as a totality, the divisions into classes by no means exhaust the description of it. The society may be founded on one group owning the means of production while others work them, but this does not explain the operation of the society. The on-going system is legitimized and perpetuated by means of the promotion of ways of life through mystification and the consequent acceptance of these definitions of reality both consciously and, at a deeper-level, unconsciously by the mass of the people. The relations of production are constantly reproduced in daily life-activity. Although there is some overt state repression of dissenters, the system is basically preserved culturally.

For present purposes, I shall make a rough distinction between what I shall call "structural" and "cultural" components of the present system of domination. Structural components include the relations of production (in the classical marxist sense), the state-system which encompasses parliament and government, the courts, prisons and the police, the public service and the military — in general the direct organs of state power. The "cultural" includes the actual ways of life of people; their modes of living and thinking; their needs, values, aspirations and view of the constitution of reality. It also includes the mass media, the education system, political and religious ideologies and the like.

Marxists have tended to concentrate on the structural aspects of capitalism to the virtual exclusion of the cultural ones. The use of the old base-superstructure model has reflected, and further facilitated this emphasis — the base being "below" the superstructure. The very notion of ownership would not even exist. Why? Because the conditions in which the notions of "ownership" and "private property" could be applicable would have been overcome. A framework in which 'private' versus 'public', inequality vies with equality and ownership struggles with non-ownership would have been superseded.

However I am not claiming only that cultural factors have been hitherto neglected and should be considered as well as structural ones — although this in itself is true enough. I want to maintain that the cultural factors are the more important ones to be considered so far as a revolutionary strategy is concerned. I believe the only viable revolutionary approach to be one which sees revolution primarily as cultural revolution.

Revolution centrally involves transcendence. If the new society is not to be the old one in different dress, the transcendence must be total, including the transformation of forms of life. This means new men with new needs, goals, visions and perceptions. These men must come from somewhere. If they are to emerge anywhere, they must exist, at least embryonically, in the old society. They may be embryonic because even if they are not able to live in a totally new way (it would be amazing if they could given the extreme violence of socialization), they have the general form and direction of free men. These embryonic new men are transitional in that they are stationed neither in the old society which they physically inhabit, nor in the new society which does not yet exist. They stand with feet in both. They are in capitalist society, but not of it; they are of the new society but not in it. Obviously these people cannot arise from the study of the critique of political economy which reinforces the schizoid dualism of intellect and emotion, a dichotomy which is so pervasive under modern capitalist domination. That is, a theory which allows mainly for structural analyses and ignores the experiencing involved in intra- and inter-personal life is inconsistent with the development of the new man whose new needs are based precisely on his sensitivity to experiencing.

For the most part people living in our society live un-thinking, automatic lives of pre-structured routine. They have internalized the norms of the society and often seek after the goals which are those of capitalism itself. Their lives are directed from outside — whether through the state or through the media. Revolutionaries may not be lasting ones), but they normally provoke enchantment with reform rather than revolution. At best, structural factors may help to create better conditions for the possibility of the awakening of revolutionary consciousness among the masses. People under advanced capitalism are generally wedded to the system which often provides the (material) benefits it promises, and they would prefer to patch it up rather than overthrow it. It goes further than this of course because the deep roots of their being are also the values of capitalism. Revolutionary transformation of the system itself is viewed as impossible, but reform is not. Elastic capitalism can accommodate a great many changes in it without altering its basic structure, but providing the illusion of progress.

Given this situation, a revolutionary strategy will aim at demonstrating the possibility of other modes of existence. Utopia will be articulated through a counter-culture which demonstrates the possibility of other modes of existence. Freedom will be articulated through a counter-culture which demonstrates the possibility of other modes of existence. This means new men with new needs, goals, visions and perceptions. These men must come from somewhere. If they are to emerge anywhere, they must exist, at least embryonically, in the old society. They may be embryonic because even if they are not able to live in a totally new way (it would be amazing if they could given the extreme violence of socialization), they have the general form and direction of free men. These embryonic new men are transitional in that they are stationed neither in the old society which they physically inhabit, nor in the new society which does not yet exist. They stand with feet in both. They are in capitalist society, but not of it; they are of the new society but not in it. Obviously these people cannot arise from the study of the critique of political economy which reinforces the schizoid dualism of intellect and emotion, a dichotomy which is so pervasive under modern capitalist domination. That is, a theory which allows mainly for structural analyses and ignores the experiencing involved in intra- and inter-personal life is inconsistent with the development of the new man whose new needs are based precisely on his sensitivity to experiencing.

In such circumstances, how can revolutionary strategies fashioned around what I have termed structural factors (e.g. imminent economic crises, the right to strike) transform basic attitudes towards living? Certainly, economic crises can, for example, precipitate some awareness of the hopeful state of capitalism (although the effects in this direction may not be lasting ones), but they normally provoke enchantment with reform rather than revolution. At best, structural factors may help to create better conditions for the possibility of the awakening of revolutionary consciousness among the masses. People under advanced capitalism are generally wedded to the system which often provides the (material) benefits it promises, and they would prefer to patch it up rather than overthrow it. It goes further than this of course because the deep roots of their being are also the values of capitalism. Revolutionary transformation of the system itself is viewed as impossible, but reform is not. Elastic capitalism can accommodate a great many changes in it without altering its basic structure, but providing the illusion of progress.

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If it is objected that this is impossible, some points may be made in reply. First, it may not be impossible at all. We may have been conditioned through the capitalist definition of reality to regard any transformation of the system as impossible. The French students in 1968 upset the established definition of reality by living alternate definitions: "Be realistic. Demand the impossible." What is called utopian may be historical possibility. Further, success should not be gauged solely in terms of whether or not a structure is seized. For example, there are those who view the France 1968 events as a failure because the government regained power. These people do not see the importance of the activity of the students in terms of a real breakthrough in the sense of a glimmer of new life. Revolution is a slow process and events such as those of France 1968 must be seen as foundational.

Cultural revolution must be permanent, not episodic. The fact that it involves ways of life incompatible with the present system involves a commitment of revolutionaries to other values. This life would be freer, more authentic and real than life which accepts the norms of the present system.

The last decade has seen the beginnings of cultural revolution. There is a long way to go in bringing about counter-culture which is genuinely outside the system. But when this counter-culture gathers mass support, the system will be immobilised. This is not to ignore the armed force of the state. However, it is only on the basis of a refusal of the system by the masses of people that it is possible to combat the state-system.

Cultural transformation is total transcendence. What is most needed today for such transformation is the spirit of utopia. DOUGLAS KIRSNER

Marxism and anarchism

If the Article by Alastair Davidson ("Marxism and Anarchism") in ALR Nov. 1971 had been called "Marx against Stirner" and if it had not confused the views of Stirner with those of anarchists generally, then one would not bother to make a reply unless one was a partisan of Stirner's. A defence of Stirner could be made along the lines of showing the degree to which his critique of Feuerbach was similar to Marx's — and may in fact have influenced Marx — and the degree to which his discussion of the place of the proletariat in bourgeois society was in line with Marx's ideas. I will not bother with this — the interested reader will find discussions in Hook's From Hegel to Marx and McLellan's The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx; my interest is in anarchism rather than in Stirner.

When a political journal publishes an article on a philosopher who was, at best, obscure in his own time and is even more so today, one wonders just what the political intention is. Now it may well be that Davidson is merely interested in the fact that "marxism was partly worked out in a critique of Stirner", but it seems much more likely that the real intention is to show (in his words) that: "the real intention is to show (in his words) that:

The Ego and its Own
egoism which also implies an anti-social as well as an anti-state position. (The Stirnerian "union of egoists" is not so much a society as a Hobbesian "state of nature"). Marx, himself no friend of the State, was concerned to attack the egoist premises and the anti-social conclusions; this does not touch on anarchism proper which does not preach revolt against society as such but just its class forms. For instance Bakunin says:

"Society, preceding in time any development of human . . . constitutes the very essence of human existence."

"A radical revolt by man against society would therefore be just as impossible as a revolt against Nature, human society being nothing else but the last great manifestation or creation of Nature upon this earth. And an individual who would want to rebel against society, that is, against Nature in general and his own nature in particular, would place himself beyond the pale of real existence, would plunge into nothingness, into an absolute void, into lifeless abstraction, into God."

The second point is that although Stirner reached anarchist conclusions (among others) from egoist premises it by no means follows that the historical anarchist movement, the movement of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta, was ever dependent on these premises. Far from anarchism depending on an absolute notion of Man as an egoist and an individual who was oppressed by social fetters" Bakunin was to say:

"Man is so much a social animal that it is impossible to think of him apart from society."

"The point of view of the idealists is altogether different. In their system man is first produced as an immortal and free being and ends up by becoming a slave. As a free and immortal being, infinite and complete in himself, he does not stand in need of society."

" . . . the individual, his freedom and reason, are the products of society, and not vice versa . . ."

Even if Stirner's basic philosophical position was "an absolute notion of Man as an egoist and individual oppressed by social fetters" it by no means follows, or even is true, that other philosophical anarchists must hold this position. (Revolu­tionary anarchists don't anyway.) The most recent work, Robert Paul Wolff's In Defense of Anarchism, is entirely independent of egoism and argues for philosophical anarchism by refuting the arguments for the sovereignty of the state up by bourgeois democratic theorists.

The fact is that Stirner's position was his own (or "his Own" if you like) only and died with him except for a handful of American individualist anarchists who were a minority even within the movement in the U.S.A. Although he is of certain theoretical interest, and is sometimes read for this reason today, he did not influence the historical anarchist movement and would be unknown today except for the efforts of non-anarchists compilers of anthologies of "anarchism". (The notion that The Ego and its Own was a bible of the actual anarchist movement is completely laughable. Stirner was "Saint Max" only to Marx.) It remains then to ask whether Marx, as well as showing that "anarchist" egoism - like any egoism - must, if consistent, lead to an elitist and tyrannical position, ever made any direct attack on the core ideas of anarchism.

It seems not. Except for his attack on Proudhon's confused mixture of half-understood economics and dialectics (a mixture that embarrassed Bakunin as a friend of Proudhon's and an ex-follower), it does not appear that Marx ever devoted a work, or part of a work, to attacking anarchism as such. For what could he attack apart from Stirner's egoism and Proudhon's confusion? In essence marxism and anarchism were in agreement. Both were revolutionary doctrines aiming at the overthrow of the state by the proletariat, that socialization of the means of production and the abolition of the state together with class society. Their divergences were probably much smaller than the divisions which
would later grow within them. Given that, contrary to Krim-
merman and Perry, "St. Max" is a saint only to Marx and
that his book is unread by most anarchists, what can be
said against the proposition that anarchism is non-authoritar-
ian, i.e. libertarian, socialism. Once anarchism is distin-
guished from philosophical egoism how can Marxism be
called an "anti-anarchism"?

To answer the last question first one remembers that Marx
started from a criticism of the theory of the state as embo-
died Frederick or Rousseau in the abstract and proceeded to a
criticism of the theory of the state as a supra-social mediator
of social interests. For Marx the end of class society is the
end of the state, i.e. the end of a social power separate from
society. To conceal the obvious affinity of this with anarch-
ism "orthodox" Marxists have pretended that anarchism inverts
the relationship; that anarchists believe that the end
of the state is the end of class society. This they can only
do by neglecting the fact that for anarchism the destruction
of the state is an act of revolution; the movement which
destroys the state does so precisely because it is the over-
throw of the old class structure with its attendant relations
of domination and subordination. Even this is not sufficient
to make the difference between the supposed anarchist and
supposed marxist positions; they had also to neglect the interpenetration
of the State and Civil Society. Having thus
destroyed the "dialectical" connections between base (civil
society) and superstructure (state) and replaced them by a simple "cause" and "effect", i.e. mechanical model, they
could then believe that anarchists were not only undialectical
(like themselves) but idealists as well because they believed
that the superstructure determined the base. This vulgar-
marxist criticism was all that one could expect from the
degeneracy of the Second International; after Lenin's State
and Revolution — a book denounced as "anarchist" by the
orthodox — and the theoretical work of Korsch, Gramsci and
Lukács, it is much harder to see how it can be made. Marx-
ism and anarchism are evolutionary theories of the State; it locates
the state in the context of class oppression; it looks forward
to the end of the state; Marxism is thus an anarchism.

If marxism and anarchism agree in that they are both
anarchist (Proudhon's term), there are still futher similarities.
The only anarchism which has played an historical role
is collectivist anarchism (anti-individualist anarchism); Bakunin
and the transmigrants called themselves revolutionary
socialists for years before anarchism became commonplace
for the movement. In terms of intellectual genesis both
Bakunin and Marx were initially impressed by Proudhon,
both rejected his mutualist economics and both rejected his
reactionary tendencies, e.g. his anti-feminism. On a philos-
ophical level anarchism is anti-idealists; some anarchists are
historical materialists like Bakunin, some have been scientific
materialists like Kropotkin and, being overly attached to the
methodology of the physical sciences, have tended less
than marxist historical and economic science and more
towards science. All anarchists worth speaking of, includ-
ing the "gentle" Kropotkin, have believed in the reality of
class warfare. The central difference between Marx and the
founder of the anarchist movement, Bakunin, was the impor-
tance to the latter of the peasantry considered as a factor
in the revolution and accordingly of methods of revolution
in countries which had not fully developed bourgeois institu-
tions. This situation reflect a "geographic" determinism;
Bakunin was a Russian in activities in eastern and southern
Europe, Marx was a German active in England.

Much is made of the so-called "fact" that marxists believe
in organisation but anarchists don't. The real position is
more complex. Marx attacked Bakunin for believing in the
directness of the revolution by a conspiratorial movement.
Marx himself believed in mass democratic organisations.
This difference too flowed from a difference in revolution-
ary geography; Marx, in England, believed that a peaceful
electoral transition to socialism was possible in the advanced
capitalist countries. Bakunin was still mainly concerned with

Russia and the backward countries of eastern and southern
Europe. What Marx, from his perspective, deplored in
Bakunin, Steklov, Bakunin's bolshevik biographer and his-
torian of the first International, was later to applaud and
claim Bakunin as a proto-bolshevik. For his part Bakunin
attacked Marx for the intention of maintaining the state
after the revolution and solving transitional problems by
the application of State power directed by experts (authoritar-
ianism) rather than by the initiative of the popular masses
(libertarianism). To be fair to Marx, Bakunin was probably
unaware of Marx's early analyses of bureaucracy and of his
decision, after the Paris Commune, in favour of a form of
revolutionary government little removed from Bakunin's own
anarchism.

What then divides anarchists from marxists? One might as
well ask what divides marxists from marxists and anarchists
from anarchists. It is not "merely" practical matters since
disputes over practice are not separable from disputes over
theory. Nor is it that anarchism is marxism minus central
control since "central control" may refer to the party before
the revolution or to society after the revolution. It is
known that anarchists have opposed the latter, but so have
some leftwing marxists; on the former anarchists are them-
selves divided. (Of course if "central control" is further
taken to mean hierarchical and bureaucratic organisation,
then anarchists are definitely opposed.) Anarchists have
always opposed party dictatorships, but then Marx himself
was not committed to one.

In the above I have stressed similarities between marxism
and anarchism. There are also differences, the main one
being that whereas marxists claim scientific status for their
doctrine anarchists merely claim that science supports their
doctrine which at core appears to consist of an ethic of
individual responsibility (quite the opposite of egoism). Not
that anarchism would elaborate a system of ethics, of course;
it is this ethical dimension of anarchism that lies behind
the current "convergence".

Every revolutionary movement needs an ethical dimension.
This does not mean that revolutionary theory needs to be
completed by an ethical theory, nor does it mean that
revolutionaries should elaborate a morality; to do so would
be to return to a pre-Marxian level, to forget the character-
isation of moralities as ideology. The ethical dimension lies
instead in the realm of practice, in the commitment of people
to the movement. It is this that western marxism had lost
in the change from commitment to the movement because
of its goals to commitment to the movement as an organi-
sation by members who had no other commitments to fall
back on.

In these circumstances the regeneration of the movement
has come from outside. A new generation impelled predo-
minantly by an anarchist ethic (with a strong admixture of
liberal outrage) has been the driving force of the recent
explosions in the west. Although speaking the language of
marxist analysis — and what other language is there for the
expression of revolutionary critique? — the impulse has not
become from claims to scientific status. Not initially at least.

One may have reservations about this development, one
can question the stability of the commitment and the accur-
acy of the analysis, but unquestionably it is the only
development of potentially revolutionary significance in the
west since 1936. In this situation the study of the relations
between marxism and anarchism, even if the knowledge of
archism becomes important and it is important that such
a study be conducted responsibly. To pass off an attack
on Stirner as a study of Marxism and Anarchism is not
good enough. Until a study is done of Bakunin the question
has not even been taken seriously and the first prerequisite
of a serious study is the rejection of Engels' remark that
anarchism was merely a compound of Proudhon and Stirner.

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