

All feathered up: a new defence of anarchism

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Review of "Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism", by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt (AK Press).

Variants of revolutionary syndicalism were major influences in the labour movements of several countries between the 1890s and World War One.

Their activists reckoned the work of the "political" socialists who spent much time on parliamentary electioneering to be deficient or even harmful, and focused effort on building up militant and democratic trade-union movements which they believed could be both the agency to overthrow capitalist power and the framework for future working-class administration of society. Some of them saw themselves as anarchists as well as syndicalists - "anarcho-syndicalists".

Schmidt and van der Walt, a journalist and an academic from Johannesburg, South Africa, tell us not only about the famous movements of France and Spain, Argentina and Mexico, but also about the less-known ones of China, Japan, and Korea.

Their book is not primarily a history. The authors reconstruct what the authors call a "broad anarchist tradition". They argued that it includes all of revolutionary syndicalism, not just the strands which called themselves anarchist. They present their own variant of "anarchism" as the most thorough and "sophisticated" development of the "tradition".

Their own version of anarchism is one in which the traditional points of dispute with Marxism are thinned down or, some of them, virtually given up; but it is accompanied by a horror of Marxism.

Schmidt and van der Walt never say straight out that they agree that a working class overthrowing capitalism must organise from among itself a strong revolutionary authority to combat counter-revolution and consolidate the new order. They never directly disavow the traditional anarchist doctrine of the immediate abolition of any form of state.

But they pointedly do not repeat Bakunin's doctrine that the task of anarchists on the day after any revolution must be (through, so Bakunin held, a "secret" network of "invisible pilots") to thwart, divert, disrupt the victorious workers in their moves to coordinate their efforts democratically by electing a revolutionary authority.

Junta

They agree with "taking power in society" and "creating a coordinated system of governance". They say "stateless governance", but the adjective "stateless", for them, seems to mean "radically democratic", "linked through delegates and mandates". In that sense, the Marxist-envisaged "workers' state" (or, in Lenin's term, "semi-state"), is "stateless".

They accept the term "Revolutionary Junta" or "Workers' Republic" for the new authority. Although in one passage they claim that "class no longer exists" once the workers' revolution wins, in other passages they concede that counter-revolutionary groups will not disappear instantly, and accept the need for the

new authority to organise "coordinated military defence" with "the best weaponry" (i.e. not just scattered militia groups with hand-weapons).

They agree that revolutionaries must build "a coherent... organisation, with a common analysis, strategy, and tactics, along with a measure of collective responsibility, expressed in a programme". They use the term "party" sometimes and the term "vanguard" often for that.

They agree that the party must be disciplined and tight. They quote with approval an account of the Nabat organisation led by Nestor Makhno: "The secretariat... was not merely 'technically' executive... It was also the movement's ideological 'pilot core'... controlling and deploying the movement's resources and militants".

While many anarchists today see the fact that Marxist organisations stretch themselves to produce and circulate weekly papers as infamous, Schmidt and van der Walt report on the extensive newspaper-producing and newspaper-selling culture of late 19th century anarchists with approval and pride.

They agree that the process of the working class preparing itself for revolution must include struggle for reforms. They approvingly quote Bakunin's statement, from the time (1867-8) when he was focused on trying to win over the bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom, that "the most imperfect republic is a thousand times better than the most enlightened monarchy... The democratic regime lifts the masses up gradually to participation in public life". (Bakunin wrote different things later).

They emphasise that the value of the struggle for reforms lies in organisation from below in the struggle; but this is not a point of difference from Marxism. They explicitly dissent from the strands in anarchism which "refuse to deal with reforms, laws, and compromises".

Schmidt and van der Walt argue that revolutionary socialists should work systematically in trade unions, generally on building sustained and organised rank-and-file movements, and also sometimes contest elections for union office.

They agree that revolutionary socialists should take up battles for national liberation - "engage seriously with national liberation struggles and [aim] at supplanting nationalism, radicalising the struggle, and merging the national and class struggles in one revolutionary movement".

They oppose "identity politics" and the "cultural relativist" "claim made by some nationalists that certain rights are alien to their cultures and therefore unimportant or objectionable".

On all these points Schmidt and van der Walt have, in effect, a criticism of most of what calls itself anarchism today different only in shading from what we in Workers' Liberty would say. They are further away from conventional anarchism than is a group like the avowedly-Marxist Socialist Workers Party

today, with its "One Solution, Revolution" slogan and its pretence that all "direct action" against the established order, even if it be led by Islamist clerical-fascists, is revolutionary and progressive.

Schmidt and van der Walt seem to stick to the old anarchist dogma of boycotting all electoral politics - "this would apply regardless of the mandates given... the wages paid to the parliamentarians, or the existence of other mechanisms to keep the parliamentarians accountable to their constituents" - and their account of anarchists in Korea who were elected to parliament there in the 1920s is disapproving. But they make little fuss about that issue.

In one passage they uphold the old anarchist idea of "the revolutionary general strike" as the only and more or less self-sufficient path to socialist revolution. But they make little of it, and other passages in the book imply a much less "fetishistic" view of the general strike.

Anti-Marxism

Their anti-Marxism is built not so much on a defence of traditional anarchist points as on a skewed presentation of Marxism. For them, Marxism from its earliest days was proto-Stalinism. They construct their picture of Marxism by "reading back" from Stalinism.

They concede that "in claiming that his theory was scientific, Marx was no different from say, Kropotkin or Reclus, who saw their own theories as scientific". But somehow they also think that Marx's claim to have worked some things out and got some things right was more sinister than the similar claim made by anyone who ventures to trouble the public with their writings.

"Classical Marxism purported to alone understand the movement of history and express the fundamental interests of the proletariat... When [this] claim to a unique truth was welded to the strategy of the dictatorship of the proletariat... the formula for a one-party dictatorship through an authoritarian state was written".

Marxist theory was also, the authors claim, "teleological", seeing history as progressing mechanically "in a straight line towards a better future", through predetermined "stages". Marx (so they allege, on the basis of out-of-context snippets from his writings on India) "considered colonialism to be progressive". The "two-stage" doctrine developed for poorer countries by the Stalinists - that workers should first support the "national bourgeoisie" in "bourgeois-democratic revolution", and look to socialist revolution only at a later "stage" - was authentic Marxism, or so Schmidt and van der Walt claim.

They say that Marx had a relatively conservative view of socialist economic organisation: "Marx believed that the law of value would operate after the 'abolition of the capitalist mode of production'... the distribution of consumer goods under socialism would be organised through... markets". On that basis they claim the ideal of communist economics - supersession of the wages system; from each according to their ability, to each according to their need - as having been pioneered by the anarchist writer Peter Kropotkin.

The poor quality of Schmidt's and van der Walt's polemic on such points can be judged from their quotations. For example, they claim that Marx was cool on trade-unions, and that it was the anarchists who explained and championed the potential of trade-union struggles.

"Marx complained that anarchists contended that workers 'must... organise themselves by trades-unions' to 'supplant the existing states'..."

This is the passage from Marx (in a letter to Paul Lafargue of April 1870) from which Schmidt and van der Walt quote their snippets:

"Bakunin's programme [held that] the working class must not occupy itself with politics. They must only organise themselves by trades-unions. One fine day, by means of the International, they will supplant the place of all existing states. You see what a caricature he [Bakunin] has made of my doctrines!

"As the transformation of the existing States into Associations is our last end, we must allow the governments, those great Trade-Unions of the ruling classes, to do as they like, because to occupy ourselves with them is to acknowledge them. Why! In the same way the old socialists said: You must not occupy yourselves with the wages question, because you want to abolish wages labour, and to struggle with the capitalist about the rate of wages is to acknowledge the wages system!

"The ass has not even seen that every class movement, as a class movement, is necessarily and was always a political movement".

Marx was not hostile or cool about workers organising in trade unions. On the contrary: he was probably (in "The Poverty of Philosophy", his polemic against Proudhon in 1846, at a time when trade unions existed only in infant form) the first socialist to argue that trade-union organisation could be central in working-class emancipation.

Marx's objection was not to organising in trade unions, but to Bakunin's claim that the working class should not also "occupy itself with politics" (i.e. struggles for political reforms, and electoral activity).

Trotsky fought Stalinism to the death. But Schmidt and van der Walt claim he "envisaged socialism as 'authoritarian leadership... centralised distribution of the labour force... the workers' state... entitled to send any worker wherever his labour may be needed', with dissenters sent to labour camps if necessary".

The footnotes show that the words put in quote marks by Schmidt and van der Walt, as if they come from Trotsky, are culled not from Trotsky himself but from "pages 128, 132" of a book by one Wayne Thorpe.

Some of the words may have been taken by Thorpe from one of the polemics in which, in late 1920 - between the Bolsheviks' voting-down of Trotsky's first proposal in February 1920 of what would become the more liberal "New Economic Policy" and the adoption of the NEP itself, on Lenin's initiative, in early 1921 - Trotsky sought expedients to get the economy of revolutionary Russia into working order in the midst of civil war. None of the words was ever written by Trotsky as a statement of his vision of socialism. The quoted string of words was never written as a whole connected passage by Trotsky anywhere.

Schmidt and van der Walt claim further that: "The differences between [Stalinism and Trotskyism]

should not be overstated: both embraced classical Marxism and its theories, both saw the USSR as post-capitalist and progressive, and both envisaged revolution by stages in less developed countries". A footnote dismisses Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution as "no break with stage theory... simply a compression of the time frame".

Although Trotsky sketched the permanent revolution theory around 1905, before Stalin became prominent in politics and before Mao Zedong was politically active at all, they call permanent revolution an "echo" of "the two-stage formulation of Stalin and Mao". Why? Apparently because Trotsky recognised that issues such as land reform, national independence, and the replacement of autocracy by elected and constitutional government would be central in the first stages of mass mobilisation in capitalistically-undeveloped countries, and could not be "skipped over".

Marxism and Trotskyism are equated to Stalinism by Schmidt and van der Walt in order to clear the way for defence of "the broad anarchist tradition", with the authors' particular variants presented as the most thorough version of that tradition. The book raises, and offers a distinctive and unusual answer to, the question: what exactly is anarchism?

Its headline argument is that "the anarchist tradition" is in history the libertarian, class-struggle, "from-below" wing of the broad socialist current of thought. The authors have the same scheme of the history of socialism as the Marxist Hal Draper's famous pamphlet "The Two Souls of Socialism" - "socialism from below" versus "socialism from above" - but for them, unlike Draper, "the broad anarchist tradition" is socialism from below, and Marxism a chief species of socialism from above.

Anarchism = unions?

Schmidt and van der Walt say that anarchism proper began only with the Bakunin wing of the First International, in the early 1870s. It was always a class-struggle movement. Anarcho-syndicalism was not a fringe development from anarchism. On the contrary, "the most important strand in anarchism has always been syndicalism: the view that unions... are crucial levers of revolution, and can even serve as the nucleus of a free socialist order".

The "broad anarchist tradition" is thus for them, so to speak, what the "broad labour movement" is to Marxists.

We know that our views are for now in a small minority, and I think Schmidt and van der Walt know that theirs are too. But we see ourselves as immersed in a broader movement which - despite all the follies and limitations which affect it now - is constantly pushed by its own activity, by its own logic and fundamentals, in our direction, for now in the shape of local flurries, and in future crises potentially wholesale.

For us, that broader movement is the labour movement; for Schmidt and van der Walt, it is the "broad anarchist tradition".

Their definition allows them to deal with what they effectively admit to be the follies of much anarchism either by defining them out - for them, Max Stirner and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were not anarchists at all - or by seeing them as vagaries and immaturities

which, with good work, will be dispelled by the logic of the movement itself.

It allows them to claim as de facto anarchists many heroes who in life did not consider themselves anarchists at all. They claim the whole of the pre-1914 revolutionary syndicalist movement in France, and the whole of the IWW, for anarchism, though most of the leaders of the French movement and of the IWW did not see themselves as anarchists, and some, like Victor Griffuelhes, secretary of the French CGT in its heroic period, were explicitly political socialists.

They claim the avowed Marxists Daniel De Leon and James Connolly as "anarchists" because of their syndicalistic views, and seem (though this is not so explicit) also to claim the "council communists" Herman Görter, Anton Pannekoek, and Otto Rühle, and modern "autonomist Marxists", for their own.

Having "secured their flank" polemically by dismissing Marxism as proto-Stalinism (all but a few Marxists whom they claim as having really been anarchists), and by portraying many traditional anarchist dogmas as mere immature errors of the movement, they free themselves to maintain some traditional anarchist tenets at a more "theoretical" level.

PART TWO

Schmidt and van der Walt insist that anarchism is a class-struggle movement - indeed, the class-struggle movement. Their evidence for this, however, comes down to nothing more than the fact that most anarchists, like most activists for radical change generally and for obvious reasons, have seen the disadvantaged and dissatisfied as their constituency, and welcome strife.

They claim (wrongly, I think) that is libel to say that Bakunin looked to the "lumpenproletariat" ("underclass", paupers, people who live from begging, theft, dole, etc.) as the agency of revolution, rather than the core wage-working class.

However, they are explicit in rejecting the Marxist views that the wage-working class - because of the way in which it is "trained, united, and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production" - is the unique and central agency of socialist revolution, and that the possibility of modern socialism depends on preconditions which are and can only be created by capitalism itself (the development of the human basis, the wage-working class, and of technology and communications).

For them, peasants are agents of socialist revolution just as much as wage-workers are, or more so. Schmidt and van der Walt quote Marx in polemic against Bakunin:

"He understands absolutely nothing about the social revolution, only its political phrases. Its economic conditions do not exist for him. As all hitherto existing economic forms, developed or undeveloped, involve the enslavement of the worker (whether in the form of wage-labourer, peasant etc.), he believes that a radical revolution is possible in all such forms alike.

"Still more! He wants the European social revolution, premised on the economic basis of capitalist production, to take place at the level of the Russian or Slavic agricultural and pastoral peoples, not to surpass this level... The will, and not the

economic conditions, is the foundation of his social revolution".

And here they enter into dispute with the real Marx, not a proto-Stalinist "Marx" of their own invention. "There [is] no need for the capitalist stage to be completed or even begun... It [is] not necessary to wait for capitalism to create the material basis for freedom; freedom would create its own material basis".

Although, as we've seen, Schmidt and van der Walt, unlike most anarchists, uphold the need for a disciplined revolutionary socialist party with a definite programme and a press, they are like traditional anarchists in that their conception of the "party" has little or no dimension of it being (in Trotsky's phrase) "the memory of the working class".

They disapprove of the Spanish anarchists joining the bourgeois governments of Catalonia and republican Spain during the Spanish civil war, but offer no discussion of lessons to be learned, or differentiations necessary in future anarchist movements if they are to avoid such things (which arose from the fact that the anarchists, having "rejected" all government, did not have a clear awareness of the difference between workers' government and bourgeois government, and so, when faced with the need for some coordinated authority for the war against the fascists, collapsed into joining bourgeois governments).

They claim the Mexican syndicalist movement for their "broad anarchist tradition", but comment on that movement's military alliance in 1915 with the bourgeois politicians Obregon and Carranza against revolutionary peasant armies only by labelling it "tragic".

The whole scheme of "socialism from below" versus "socialism from above" has the same deficiencies in the hands of Schmidt and van der Walt as it has in those of Hal Draper, despite the many merits of Draper's writings using the same scheme.

Unlike Marx's differentiation, in the Communist Manifesto, of socialist currents into working-class communism and various strands of what he called "reactionary socialism" influenced by other classes (feudal remnants, do-gooding bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, etc.), this is an idealist scheme. On the one hand, the good, generous, democratic-minded guys and girls who want their socialism to be "from below"; on the other hand, the bad guys who wish it "from above".

Given that the world includes bad guys and girls as well as good ones, one wonders about the basis for hoping that the good ones will win out within the broad stream of socialist thought. History so far, after all, and socialist history as presented by Draper and by Schmidt and van der Walt, has been more like the old verse:

The rain it raineth every day
Upon the just and unjust fella,
But more upon the just because
The unjust hath the just's umbrella.

The sorting-out of socialists into good and bad types in this scheme tends to be arbitrary. Draper put all anarchists in the "from above" bag, on the basis of the real logic of Bakunin's wish for "invisible pilots" to thwart workers' attempts at organising their own democratic authority after revolution, and some real citations from Proudhon, but in a way that is unfair to

many real-life anarchists. Schmidt and van der Walt, as we've seen, want to disavow Proudhon and Stirner as not anarchists at all, and claim De Leon and Connolly as good guys, as "from below" types.

Since revolution is not just a counterposition of "below" to "above", but an activity in which those "below" move to become "above", "from below" versus "from above" is not an adequate paraphrase of "by class struggle" versus "by petitioning or by bureaucratic or military coup".

Lenin put it like this: "Limitation, in principle, of revolutionary action to pressure from below and renunciation of pressure also from above is anarchism... He who does not understand the new tasks in the epoch of revolution, the tasks of action from above, he who is unable to determine the conditions and the programme for such action, has no idea whatever of the tasks of the proletariat in every democratic revolution".

Schmidt and van der Walt are right about one thing. Anarchism as a movement (or maybe the word "movement" is too definite, and the French word "mouvance", which has no exact English equivalent, would be better) does date from the 1872 split in the First International. Bakunin and Kropotkin were much more its founders than Proudhon or Stirner.

But what was that split really about? Was it - as it would have to be, if Schmidt and van der Walt's broad scheme were correct - a split between proto-Stalinism on one side, and class-struggle socialism on the other?

It was not. The issues, as stated by both sides, were:

One: political action by the working class. Bakunin's wing objected to the following resolution of the Hague Congress of the International, in September 1872:

"In its struggle against the collective power of the propertied classes, the working class cannot act as a class except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from and opposed to all old parties formed by the propertied classes.

"This constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to insure the triumph of the social revolution, and of its ultimate end, the abolition of classes.

"The combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economical struggles ought, at the same time, to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists.

"The lords of land and the lords of capital will always use their political privileges for the defence and perpetuation of their economical monopolies, and for the enslavement of labour. The conquest of political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class".

Two: the organisation of the International itself. Marx argued for an extension of the powers of the General Council (actually very modest: it amounted to no more than giving the General Council power to suspend units of the International, subject to a raft of safeguards). The Bakunin wing held that the future society must have no elected central authority, and the International must "prefigure" that future.

"The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself. We must therefore strive to make this organisation as close as possible

to our ideal. How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible. The International, embryo of the future society, must from now on faithfully reflect our principles of federation and liberty, and must reject any principle tending toward authority and dictatorship".

Marx remonstrated that this doctrine, despite all the "anti-authoritarians" acclaim for grass-roots rebellion, meant trying to make the working-class struggle develop not according to its own logic but in subordination to "principles" deduced from the leaders' picture of an ideal future society.

"Had the Communards realised that the Commune was 'the embryo of the future human society', they would have thrown away all discipline and all weapons - things which must disappear as soon as there are no more wars..." "All arms with which to fight must be drawn from society as it is and the fatal conditions of this struggle have the misfortune of not being easily adapted to the idealistic fantasies which these doctors in social science have exalted as divinities, under the names of Freedom, Autonomy, Anarchy".

The "autonomous working men's sections" which the "anti-authoritarians" counterposed to an International led by the General Council would "become so many schools, with these gentlemen from the Alliance [Bakunin's friends] as their teachers. They formulate the idea through 'prolonged study'. They then 'bring it home to our working men's associations'. To them, the working class is so much raw material, a chaos which needs the breath of their Holy Spirit to give it form".

The 1872 split was not a clean sorting-out of "anti-authoritarians" even on Bakunin's definition. Many supported Bakunin, to one degree or another, who were not anarchists, but had grievances against a General Council which they saw as dominated by Marx - for example, George Eccarius, secretary of the International until May 1872; John Hales, his successor in that post; César de Paepe in Belgium; and the "Lassalleans" in Germany, whom Marx had criticised in 1868 for wanting "dictatorialism" and an excessively centralised regime in the workers' movement!

Another strand was complaint against the General Council and Marx for being too "German". Schmidt and van der Walt pick up that strand, stressed at the time by Bakunin. "Classical Marxists [saw] particular states as 'progressive'... Marx and Engels tended to cast Germany in the role of champion of progress in Europe... Their preference for Germany arguably hid an 'irrational nationalism'..."

They make much of Marx and Engels, in private correspondence at the start of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870, suggesting that their German comrades should vote for war credits (as the Lassalleans did) because this was for Germany a "war to defend its national existence" which it had been "forced into" by the aggression of the French emperor, Bonaparte. In fact the war had been deliberately engineered by the Prussian chancellor, Bismarck. Although Marx and Engels did not know that, they quickly came to endorse and acclaim the stance of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in refusing war credits, and approvingly quoted a German workers' declaration:

"We declare the present war to be exclusively dynastic".

Marx and Engels were far from being German patriots. In the midst of the First International period, Marx wrote to Kugelmann: "Lassalle's successors oppose me... because they are aware of my avowed opposition to what the Germans call 'Realpolitik'. It is this sort of 'reality' which places Germany so far behind all civilised countries" (emphasis added).

The real issue was what Schmidt and van der Walt tactfully call "an occasional tendency [by Bakunin] to stereotype the Germans", and the anarchist historian Max Nettlau called Bakunin's "nationalist psychosis".

Whereas Marx, Engels, and their comrades quickly developed an independent working-class stance on the 1870 war, Bakunin explicitly sided with Imperial France. That difference did not become an issue in the split in the International, but Kropotkin's siding with France against Germany in World War One was a stance with real roots in anarchist tradition as well as a personal lapse.

In sum, the 1872 split was not between a Bakunin arguing for class-struggle socialism from below, and a Marx pressing towards Stalinism. The issues were those which Marxists since then have seen as central disputes with anarchism: whether workers should mobilise politically (in battles for political reform, and in independent working-class electoral activity), and whether workers should have a cohesive organisation based on the logic of class struggle within capitalism, or a loose network designed by reading back from a picture of an ideal future society.

A review of the background, in the trajectories of the First International and of Bakunin, confirms that assessment.

As Marx described it in his Inaugural Address for the First International, the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe was followed by "an epoch of industrial fever, moral marasmus, and political reaction".

By the early 1860s, things were changing. The "industrial fever" had created sizeable industrial working classes in several countries, whereas in 1848 one had existed only in Britain.

The London Trades Council, though feeble by comparison with future trade-union organisations, became a force. The French workers gained some elbow-room. Oddly, in terms of the subsequent polemics, the major expression of this was an independent workers' candidature in March 1864 by Henri Tolain, who was a Proudhonist (proto-anarchist) and theoretically hostile to political action.

Solidarity with an uprising by the Polish people against Russian rule, in 1863, and with the North in the American Civil War (1861-5), further mobilised workers and the left.

The London Trades Council and Tolain's group organised a joint meeting in London in September 1864. The common account by biographers, and by Marx himself, is that Marx had withdrawn into his study and the British Library since the defeat of the 1848 movement. In fact he had remained involved in the affairs of the German worker-exiles in London (who were, given the repressive conditions in Germany, one of the nearest things there was a live German workers' movement). He was invited to the September 1864 meeting to represent the German workers.

He joined the General Council set up from the September 1864 meeting, bringing with him at least four veterans of his organisation from 1848, the Communist League.

In the earliest discussions, he was able to steer the new movement towards a class-struggle rather than just an abstract democratic political basis. He won acceptance for a "Preamble" to the Rules of the International which stated its aims in the following terms:

"The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves... the struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule;

"The economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour - that is, the source of life - lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence;

"The economical emancipation of the working classes is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means;

"All efforts aiming at the great end hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries" - and therefore the International should organise that bond of solidarity.

PART THREE

The First International recruited substantially from its activity in supporting workers' strikes. It was initially a conglomerate of many shadings of socialist thought and many people who were not really socialists at all but rather radical democrats. In 1864 all the schools of socialist thought, Marx's too, lacked authoritative, readily-available texts codifying their ideas.

In 1864 nothing written by Marx was in general circulation. The Communist Manifesto of 1848 had had no new edition in any language since 1850. New editions in various languages appeared after 1865, as the International created a reading public for them, but only after.

Marx's "Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy" had been published in 1859; but only in German, and it was a severe economic text, with no immediate politics in it. Marx published "Capital" volume 1 in 1867 (in German), and a French translation came out in 1872-5 (an English translation, in 1886).

By patient argument within the International, Marx won a majority for three key ideas:

One: that strikes and trade unions must not only be supported, but were central to the working class organising and educating itself for emancipation. In a long debate in the General Council with an old Owenite socialist, John Weston, Marx refuted the alleged "iron law of wages" believed by many socialists at the time, according to which capitalism inevitably reduced wages to a subsistence minimum and all battles for higher wages must be fruitless.

Two: that the working class must aim for the expropriation of the capitalists and public ownership of the means of production. (The Proudhonists traditionally looked instead to the growth of a network of workers' cooperatives linked by "fair exchange" and crowding out capitalist production rather than expropriating the capitalists. Bakunin sided with Marx on this).

Three: that the working class must engage in political action (battles for reforms made by law, and electoral action) as well as economic struggle.

The climax of Marx's activity in the First International was his writing of "The Civil War in France", the International's statement of solidarity with the Paris Commune of March-May 1871. This was the major text by Marx likely to be read by the activists of the International.

"Marxism", for the purposes of the 1872 split, meant the ideas expressed in "The Civil War in France", and in the resolutions of the First International.

Engels, later, would summarise his and Marx's argument: "Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat".

In the text itself Marx argued that the Commune was "essentially a working-class government... the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour".

It had shown that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes". The working class must create a new form of state, a semi-state as Lenin would call it.

The Commune had suppressed the standing army and substituted for it the armed people. It was made up of elected representatives who were accountable to their voters and easily recallable.

It was "a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time" - not like a bourgeois parliament, which, at best, limits and demands consultation from an executive government separate from it and standing above it.

It had done away with any separate, privileged bureaucratic corps of unelected state officials. "From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at workmen's wages".

Explaining how his view differed from the anarchists, Marx wrote that "this new Commune, which breaks the modern State power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the medieval Communes" (idealised by Bakunin, and, later, even more so by Kropotkin). "The Communal constitution has been mistaken for an attempt to break up into a federation of small states". (Bakunin and his friends insisted that the future society must be a federation of small local units). Local liberties should be guaranteed: but "the few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally mis-stated, but were to be discharged by Communal... agents".

The "Civil War in France" was the main text on which Lenin would later draw to write his "State and Revolution", and the Bolsheviks to propose the rule of

workers' councils (soviets) as the form of a workers' regime.

Although they are warm towards the "council communists", who favoured workers' councils but came to reject a centralised revolutionary party and electoral activity by revolutionary socialists - some of them also to reject trade-union activity - Schmidt and van der Walt make no explicit and definite comment on workers' councils, and in some passages seem to hold on to the pre-1914 revolutionary syndicalist line that trade unions, when smartened up enough, will embody workers' rule.

In any case, a split against a "Marxism" defined principally by "The Civil War in France" was assuredly not a split against a socialism of manipulating the existing state machine or "one-party dictatorship through an authoritarian state".

What did Bakunin and his friends say at the time? They supported the Commune and agreed with Marx on that against the English trade union leaders in the International who recoiled in horror from the Paris workers' revolution and Marx's fierce defence of it. Like the Marxists, they would continue to honour the Commune and celebrate its anniversaries. As far as I know, they gave no direct reply to Marx's swipe at them in "The Civil War".

Bakunin complained that "in order to fight the monarchist and clerical reaction they [the Commune] were compelled to organise themselves in a Jacobin manner, forgetting or sacrificing the first conditions of revolutionary socialism". Kropotkin, later, would be even more critical of the Commune as too "Jacobin".

Marx and Engels, by contrast, later, when the lapse of time had given licence for franker criticism of the Commune than would have been decent at the time of its bloody suppression by the French bourgeoisie, wrote (in effect) that the Commune had not been "Jacobin" enough - not forceful, radical, pushy enough. "In the economic sphere much was left undone which, according to our view today, the Commune ought to have done. The hardest thing to understand is certainly the holy awe with which they remain standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France. This was also a serious political mistake. The bank in the hands of the Commune - this would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages [in terms of pressure on the bourgeois government at Versailles]".

In 1871 Bakunin wrote about his encounters with Marx in the 1840s. "As far as learning was concerned, Marx was, and is still, incomparably more advanced than I... He called me a sentimental idealist, and he was right; I called him vain, perfidious, and cunning..."

In 1872 the distinguishing mark of Bakunin and his friends was still "sentimental idealism" - the sentimental rejection of the necessary means of struggle in the name of a vague scheme for an instant ideal stateless future society.

Marx regarded the Bakunin wing as a relapse of a section of the International into the old utopian socialism.

"We cannot repudiate these patriarchs of socialism [the old utopian socialists], just as chemists cannot repudiate their forebears the alchemists, [but] we must at least avoid falling back into their mistakes, which, if we were to commit them, would be inexcusable".

Relapse was given momentum by the general backlash after the defeat of the Commune. In a similar way, the backlash after the defeat of the 1848 revolutions had led in September 1850 to a split in the Communist League in which the anti-Marx faction, according to Marx, fell into an approach where "the will, rather than the actual conditions, was stressed as the chief factor in the revolution" and "the word 'proletariat' [was] reduced to a mere phrase, like the word 'people' was by the democrats".

Later Plekhanov, in his pamphlet "Anarchism and Socialism", would expound Marx's thought in more detail, arguing that "in their criticism of the 'political constitution', the 'fathers' of anarchy always based themselves on the Utopian point of view", namely on the assertion that human nature favours liberty and solidarity, the state is an artificial imposition, and capitalism is the product of the state.

Bakunin, moving from his native Russia to study in Germany in 1840, became a revolutionary democrat in the 1840s. In 1849 he was praised by Marx for his role in a rising in Dresden.

Arrested after that rising, he spent eight years in jail, mostly in Russia and in atrocious conditions, and then four years in Siberian exile. In 1861 he escaped from Siberia to Western Europe.

Bakunin was still a revolutionary democrat rather than a strong socialist. At first his political plan was to work with the liberal exile Alexander Herzen. Then he flirted inconclusively with Garibaldi and with the Polish nationalist leader Mierosławski.

He came to call himself a "revolutionary socialist". In 1867-8 he and some friends entered and tried to take over the just-launched radical-bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom.

He gave up within a year; but he wrote an elaborate document putting his views to the League - probably the longest and most complete political statement which Bakunin, notorious for rarely finishing things he started writing, ever published. It suggests that he then still saw his "revolutionary socialism" as more extreme than bourgeois democracy, rather than in irreducible class opposition to it.

He acclaimed the "complete emancipation... of industry and commerce... from the supervision and protection of the State"; remonstrated that "the majority of decent, industrious bourgeois" could quite well support his, Bakunin's, programme; limited his social-economic demands to changing "the law of inheritance, gradually at first, until it is entirely abolished as soon as possible"; and made no demand for the expropriation of capitalist property or the collective ownership of the means of production.

Disappointed in the League, he joined the International in 1868. His focus was still on anti-statism, and no doubt he still thought of Marx as "vain, perfidious, and cunning"; but his writings of that time suggest that he was genuinely won over by Marx's ideas as transmitted through the International. They read as paraphrases - with a particular bias and twist, but paraphrases - of the general ideas of the International. He started work on a Russian translation of Marx's Capital, which he would never finish.

Diffuse and restless as ever in his thinking, in 1869-70 he got drawn into an alliance by a demented "nihilist", Sergei Nechayev, who held that the true revolutionary was defined by contempt for all moral

standards, including in his dealings with his own comrades, and "must ally himself with the savage word of the violent criminal, the only true revolutionary in Russia".

He recoiled from Nechayev. Bakunin supported France in the 1870 Franco-Prussian war, and with a couple of comrades made an abortive attempt at an anarchist rising in Lyon (September 1870).

In 1870-2, finding sympathy for his resentments against Marx among Swiss activists of the International, Bakunin led a faction fight which ended in the split of September 1872. Soon after that, in October 1873, he resigned from his local organisation, the Jura Federation, on grounds of ill-health and political disappointment. He spent most of the remaining time before his death in July 1876 in seclusion.

Some of Bakunin's ideas would be developed and codified, from the mid-1870s to World War One, by Peter Kropotkin, a much clearer and more systematic writer than Bakunin. But Bakunin's is not the record of a political figure who could in 1871-2 have represented a distinct "class-struggle" opposition to supposedly stodgier ideas coming from Marx.

The Bakunin wing's opposition in 1871-2 to electoral activity by socialists was not an exaggerated but understandable reaction against socialists allowing that activity to suck in too much of their energies and their hopes. At that time working-class electoral candidates were extremely rare.

Later new issues would arise. Socialists would allow electoral activity to suck in too much of their energies and their hopes.

The general principle established by Marx of the need for socialists to build and seek to broaden out trade unions would be complicated by the rise of trade-union bureaucracies, increasingly separating off into a distinct social layer mediating between workers and the bosses.

Those developments would give new life to anarchism, or at least to that wing of anarchism which swung away from the "propaganda of the

deed" (assassinations of ruling-class figures) which had dominated anarchist activity in the 1880s to try to find a new basis in the growing workers' movements.

The revolutionary syndicalism of the decades before World War One was never (despite Schmidt and van der Walt) exclusively or even in majority anarchist; but some anarchists, such as Fernand Pelloutier and Emile Pouget in France, played a positive and important part in developing it.

It became, as Trotsky would put it, "a remarkable rough draft of revolutionary communism". Where the pre-1914 "political" socialists, too often, were content with the general perspective of building up and strengthening the workers' movement, the revolutionary syndicalists worked to transform, to invigorate, to democratise, to educate a workers' movement which they understood would tend to become conservatised and bureaucratised if left to its spontaneous course in capitalist society.

That dimension of socialist activity was taken up by the Communist International in its early years (1919-22), but quickly marginalised as the Communist International became Stalinised. Today groups like the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party leave it marginalised, and in that sense the revolutionary syndicalism which Schmidt and van der Walt celebrate still has ideas to teach us, ideas which need to be rediscovered and redeveloped in today's conditions.

When the IWW leader Big Bill Haywood, in August 1920, read an appeal by the Communist International leadership written to try to convince IWW activists that the International was the best continuation of the IWW's tradition, he exclaimed: "Here is what we have been dreaming about; here is the IWW all feathered out!"

He was right, I think. Schmidt's and van der Walt's scheme, by contrast, is traditional anarchism all feathered up.