

“The revolution will not be televised’– nor will it be monitored by Amnesty International...”

DEMOCRACY

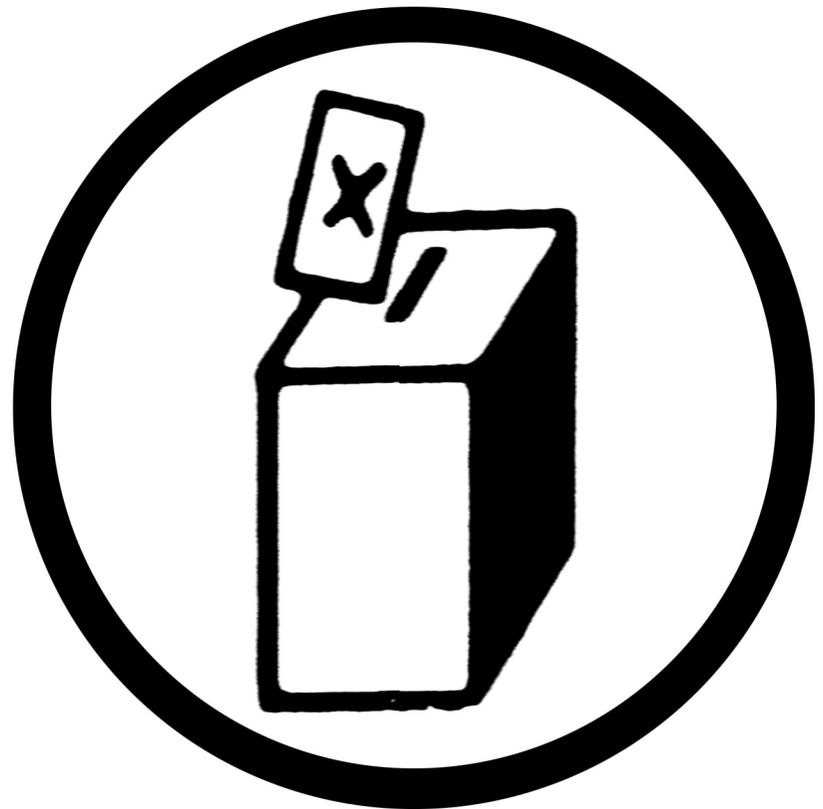
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NEITHER DEMOCRATS, NOR DICTATORS: ANARCHISTS

by Errico Malatesta
from *Pensiero e Volonta* (May 1926)

Theoretically 'democracy' means popular government; government by all for everybody by the efforts of all. In a democracy the people must be able to say what they want, to nominate the executors of their wishes, to monitor their performance and remove them when they see fit.

Naturally this presumes that all the individuals that make up a people are able to form an opinion and express it on all the subjects that interest them. It implies that everyone is politically and economically independent and therefore no-one, to live, would be obliged to submit to the will of others.

If classes and individuals exist that are deprived of the means of production and therefore dependent on others with a monopoly over those means, the so-called democratic system can only be a lie, and one which serves to deceive the mass of the people and keep them docile with an outward show of sovereignty, while the rule of the privileged and dominant class is in fact salvaged and consolidated. Such is democracy and such it always has been in a capitalist structure, whatever form it takes, from constitutional monarchy to so-called direct rule.

There could be no such thing as a democracy, a government of the people, other than in a socialistic regime, when the means of production and of living are socialised and the right of all to intervene in the running of public affairs is based on and guaranteed by the economic independence of every person. In this case it would seem that the democratic system was the one best able to guarantee justice and to harmonise individual independence with the necessities of life in society. And so it seemed, more or less clearly, to those who, in the era of the absolute monarchs, fought, suffered and died for freedom.

But for the fact that, looking at things as they really are, the government of all the people turns out to be an impossibility, owing to the fact that the individuals who make up the people have differing opinions and desires and it never, or almost never happens, that on any one question or problem all can be in agreement. Therefore the

might somehow be able to make a large of decisions about which records they buy, which inmates serve long sentences, what the color the street lights are, etc. is irrelevant.

The community that escapes capitalism will involve people effectively controlling their process of living. This the individual and collective refusal of work, commodity production, exploitation etc. This certainly will require a large amount of collective decision making and a large amount of individual decision making. The transformation cannot be reduced to a set way of making decisions or a fixed plan of action.

The different modes of living are easier to describe using Marxian terminology sometimes because it speaks in terms of social processes rather than atomized individual actions. The economy is both a way people make decisions and a way people act. You can only see the real conditions of society by looking at the conditions of daily life - how a society's mode of existence reproduces itself. This is summarized fairly well using the Marxian terms of political economy, spectacle, commodity etc.

All forms of democratic ideology appeal to a model of human behavior that implies each person is wholly separate social agent that only affects others in fixed, definable ways. This is the language of "common sense" in a world where people's senses are controlled by capitalism. It defend the right, for example, for a man to shout cat-calls at woman who has previously been raped because that man's actions are simply "free speech" not connected to any social action.

Communist positions see a social web which to not reducible to a fixed number to definable relations. Communists do not say that without capitalism we can guarantee that humans will create a human community. It says with capitalism, humans cannot create a human community. It sees that any movement for a human community will oppose capitalist social order and social relationships all along the way. The motivating force will not come with a communist blue-print but from the process of living of proletarians creating a new social relation.

'government of all the people', if we have to have government, can at best be only the government of the majority. And the democrats, whether socialists or not, are willing to agree. They add, it is true, that one must respect minority rights; but since it is the majority that decides what these rights are, as a result minorities only have the right to do what the majority wants and allows. The only limit to the will of the majority would be the resistance which the minorities know and can put up. This means that there would always be a social struggle, in which a part of the members, albeit the majority, has the right to impose its own will on the others, yoking the efforts of all to their own ends.

And here I would make an aside to show how, based on reasoning backed by the evidence of past and present events, it is not even true that where there is government, namely authority, that authority resides in the majority and how in reality every 'democracy' has been, is and must be nothing short of an 'oligarchy' – a government of the few, a dictatorship. But, for the purposes of this article, I prefer to err on the side of the democrats and assume that there can really be a true and sincere majority government.

Government means the right to make the law and to impose it on everyone by force: without a police force there is no government.

Now, can a society live and progress peacefully for the greater good of all, can it gradually adapt to ever-changing circumstances if the majority has the right and the means to impose its will by force on the recalcitrant minorities?

The majority is, by definition, backward, conservative, enemy of the new, sluggish in thought and deed and at the same time impulsive, immoderate, suggestible, facile in its enthusiasms and irrational fears. Every new idea stems from one or a few individuals, is accepted, if viable, by a more or less sizeable minority and wins over the majority, if ever, only after it has been superseded by new ideas and new needs and has already become outdated and rather an obstacle, rather than a spur to progress.

But do we, then, want a minority government?

Certainly not. If it is unjust and harmful for a majority to oppress minorities and obstruct progress, it is even more unjust and harmful for a minority to oppress the whole population or impose its own ideas by force which even if they are good ones would excite repugnance and opposition because of the very fact of being imposed.

And then, one must not forget that there are all kinds of different

minorities. There are minorities of egoists and villains as there are of fanatics who believe themselves to be possessed of absolute truth and, in perfectly good faith, seek to impose on others what they hold to be the only way to salvation, even if it is simple silliness. There are minorities of reactionaries who seek to turn back the clock and are divided as to the paths and limits of reaction. And there are revolutionary minorities, also divided on the means and ends of revolution and on the direction that social progress should take.

Which minority should take over?

This is a matter of brute force and capacity for intrigue, and the odds that success would fall to the most sincere and most devoted to the general good are not favourable. To conquer power one needs qualities that are not exactly those that are needed to ensure that justice and well-being will triumph in the world.

But I shall here continue to give others the benefit of the doubt and assume that a minority came to power which, among those who aspire to government, I considered the best for its ideas and proposals. I want to assume that the socialists came to power and would add, also the anarchists, if I am not prevented by a contradiction in terms.

This would be the worst of all?

Yes, to win power, whether legally or illegally, one needs to have left by the roadside a large part of one's ideological baggage and to have got rid of all one's moral scruples. And then, once in power, the big problem is how to stay there. One needs to create a joint interest in the new state of affairs and attach to those in government a new privileged class, and suppressing any kind of opposition by all possible means. Perhaps in the national interest, but always with freedom-destructive results.

An established government, founded on the passive consensus of the majority and strong in numbers, in tradition and in the sentiment – sometimes sincere – of being in the right, can leave some space to liberty, at least so long as the privileged classes do not feel threatened. A new government, which relies for support only on an often slender minority, is obliged through necessity to be tyrannical.

One need only think what the socialists and communists did when they came to power, either betraying their principles and comrades or by flying colours in the name of socialism and communism.

This is why we are neither for a majority nor for a minority government; neither for democracy nor for dictatorship.

NOTES ON DEMOCRACY

from Against Sleep and Nightmare

Democratic ideology essentially contains two sort of the illusions:

1. The idea that under all circumstance the morally superior way of making decisions is having some sort of electoral participation by the majority.
2. The idea that the method of decision making is what distinguishes different sort of social system.

These illusions have many forms and are interrelated. Mainstream American democratic rhetoric justifies political decisions by the use of both elections and polls. It is “very democratic” in the sense that the passive choices of the majority can change the form that the American repression and exploitation take.

Worker's self-management is a more obscure form of this illusion which claims that the changes in the way a factories' decisions are made will change the form that an entire society will take. It's basic position is summarized in the sticker that calls for workers to “fire” their bosses, and apparently continue production in the same old way.

It is important for revolutionaries to oppose both versions of democratic ideology. On one hand, after a revolution there certainly won't be any reason to fixate on the process of reaching each decision. For example, one person could be assigned to decide a day's delivery schedule in a communal warehouse without oppressing the other workers - who might prefer to spend their time walking on the beach. This dispatcher would have no coercive power over the other participants in the warehouse and deciding the schedule would not give her power that she could accumulate and exchanged for other things. For their own enjoyment, the worker might on the other hand want to collectively decide the menu of a communal kitchen even it was a less efficient use of time.

On the other hand, it's important to realize that no scheme for managing society will by itself create a new society. Highly democratic, highly authoritarian and mixed schemes are now used to administer capitalism. The basic quality of this capitalism that the average person has little or no control of their daily mode of living. Wage labor dominates society. You must exchange your life to buy back your survival. Whether the average person under capitalism

The idea of communist revolution as a vast democratic reorganisation of society is a very strong one, even within political tendencies which we think might have something going for them. The council communists (such as Pannekoek) literally saw the workers' councils as parliaments of the working class. Even the Situationists had serious hang-ups about democracy – talking about “direct democracy” and so on. If you read “*Enragés and Situationists in the movement of the occupations*” you’ll find them making various claims about how their actions expressed the democratic will of the Sorbonne Assembly while it’s obvious that they were continually breaking with the decisions of the assembly or just asking it to rubber-stamp the things that they’d done.

In general, it’s no coincidence that people who advocate democracy also tend to advocate self-management – that is, taking over chunks of this society and running them ourselves. The connection is a simple one – communism is about transforming social relations, not just about changing the political regime, which is what the democrats want to do.

In the case of the council communists, self-management was pretty obviously what they were about. With the Situs it was more a case of them not making a real break from their self-managementist origins.

Another example of this kind of problem might be the concept of “planning”, which I know a lot of people are quite attached to. To me, “planning” implies that we all get together and decide what we are going to be doing for the next 5 years and *then* we go away and do it. This sounds like another example of fetishising the moment of decision-making. So, as communist, that is to say: enemies of democracy, I think we should be very suspicious of the concept of planning. As opponents of social-democracy we need to reject *democracy* every bit as vigorously as we reject *socialism*.

We are for the abolition of the gendarme. We are for the freedom of all and for free agreement, which will be there for all when no one has the means to force others, and all are involved in the good running of society. We are for anarchy.

PARLIAMENT OR DEMOCRACY

selections from the pamphlet “Parliament or Democracy”
by the Workers Solidarity Federation (Ireland)

Throughout history there has been an alternative idea of democracy - this is the idea of direct democracy. It surfaced during the Paris Commune (in 1871), it surfaced in Russia during the early part of the revolution there, and it was put into large-scale practice in Spain between 1936-37. It is the method often used by workers in a strike; it is the method that often arises ‘spontaneously’ when people confront the State or the bosses. Direct democracy is the democracy that anarchists advocate.

Direct democracy is different to parliamentary democracy in a number of important ways:

1. Direct democracy is about ‘originating’ ideas as much as it is about ‘approving’ them. In parliamentary democracy, people are never asked for their own ideas - they are only asked to ‘approve’ or ‘disapprove’ of ideas already prepared for them. Direct democracy is radically different in that way. Direct democracy is based on the realistic notion that ‘people know best how to look after their own situation’. We don’t need specialists to tell us how to run our places of work or our communities. Anarchists argue that we are quite capable of doing this ourselves. All we need are the resources and the right to do this. Direct democracy is the method.

2. Direct democracy is based on delegation not representation. The crucial difference between delegation and representation is that delegates are only elected to implement specific decisions. Delegates do not have the right (like TDs or MPs) to change a decision previously made by an assembly of people. Delegates (unlike representatives) can be immediately recalled and dismissed from their mandate if they don’t carry out the specific function allotted to them.

3. Direct democracy is as much about the workplace as it is about the community. In parliamentary democracy, the workplace is ‘immune’ to democracy (save what rights workers have won through their unions). In direct democracy, the operation of a factory or a plant or an office will be via a general assembly of all workers. This body will decide on conditions of work, will elect re-callable managers, and will

examples of how the class struggle is anti-democratic in practice. The strike itself did not start democratically – there was no ballot, no series of mass meetings. It began with walk-outs at a few pits threatened with closure, and was then spread by flying pickets. Throughout the strike there was an unholy alliance of the right-wing of the Labour Party and the RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) saying that the miners should hold a national ballot. The most militant miners consistently rejected this, saying things like: “scabs don’t have the right to vote away another man’s job” – which is a democratic form of words but I think you will agree that the attitude behind it certainly isn’t. On occasions, members of the RCP were quite rightly beaten up and called “Tories” because of their support for a ballot.

There were also numerous examples of sabotage and destruction of Coal Board property, often organised by semi-clandestine, so-called “hit squads”. Obviously, such activities, by their very nature, cannot be organised democratically – whether or not they are approved of by a majority of the strikers.

COMMUNITY OF STRUGGLE

A concept which I’ve already used here, and which I’m quite attached to, is “community of struggle”. Obviously, a question which will be asked is: “If a community of struggle doesn’t act democratically, then how *does* it act?”. There is no simple answer to this, except to say that the basis of action will be the trust and solidarity between the people involved and not their supposed equality or rights. For example, if we want to send someone as an emissary (well, I don’t like the word “delegate”) to spread the struggle we wouldn’t insist on them being voted for by at least 51% of the meeting or on them carrying a mobile phone so we can recall them at a moment’s notice and replace them with someone else. We *would* insist on them being trustworthy and reliable – one trusted comrade is worth a thousand revocable delegates! Of course, there would be a large political component to this trust – we wouldn’t send a member of the Labour Party because their political views would automatically lead them to act against the interests of the working class.

COMMUNIST SOCIETY

Finally, I want to say a few words about the implication of all this for the nature of communist society.

2) **Separation between decision making and action** – Nothing can be done until everybody has had a chance to discuss it. This can be seen as analogous to the separation between the legislative and executive arms of a democratic state. It's no coincidence that discussions within democratic organisations often resemble parliamentary debate!

3) **Embodiment of the view that no one can be trusted** – Democratic structures take the “war of all against all” for granted, and institutionalise it. Delegates always have to be revocable so they won't pursue their own hidden agenda which, of course, everyone has.

All of these principles embody social atomisation. Majoritarianism because everyone is equal and usually has one vote. The separation between decision making and action because it's only fair that you should consult everyone before acting – if you don't you are violating their rights. A particularly obnoxious example of the third thing – embodying the view that no one can be trusted – is the demand for “Faction Rights” put forward by Trots. Usually they call for this when some organisation is trying to throw them out. What this right amounts to is the freedom to plot and conspire against other members of what is supposedly a working class organisation. Obviously, no genuine communist organisation could *ever* entertain *any* idea of faction Rights.

It is probably the second of these principles which is the most important and which needs to be stressed here.

These democratic principles can only stand in complete opposition to the class struggle since, by definition, the class struggle implies a break with social atomisation and the formation of some kind of community – however narrow, transient or vague this may be.

Major events in the class struggle almost never begin with a vote or with everybody being consulted. They almost always begin with action by a determined minority who break from the passivity and isolation of the majority of proletarians around them. They then try to spread this action through example rather than through reasoned argument. In other words, the division between decision making and action is always being breached in practice. Right-wing populists (and a few anarchists) complain that trouble-making activities are organised by self-appointed cliques of activists who represent no one but themselves... and, of course, they're right!

The miners' strike in the UK in 1984-5 provided many inspiring

organise how work is done. It will also elect people (as delegates) who will co-ordinate with the other places of work and with the broader community. Regional organisation will be managed through a federation of workplaces using a delegate structure.

Could such a form of democracy work and what would it be like? As mentioned earlier, Spain provides one of the best examples of how far we can go in organising a new type of society. The collectives that were built by the workers of Spain between 1936-37 were highly democratic. But they also showed the massive potential that we have if freed from the constraints of capitalism. It seems obvious (though it is impossible under capitalism) that we should all have a say over the work we do, how we do it, when and in what way. When we do have these rights, the quality and nature of our work changes enormously - and this is one of the things that was achieved in Spain. Democracy and work should always go together - and it is one of the singular failures of parliamentary democracy that this has never occurred - nor is it ever likely to occur because of the threat it poses to capitalism and the rule of the boss.

The Spanish Revolution began in 1936 and was strongly influenced by anarchist ideas. It was a large-scale revolution and was without any doubt the most extensive workers' revolution in the 20th century - especially to the extent that Spanish society was transformed.

The Spanish Revolution was also particularly democratic - this was in part a reflection of the natural tendencies of popular revolutions, but it was also an expression of the wide influence of anarchist ideas which prioritised participation and mass assemblies in the struggle against Spanish capitalism.

Anarchist ideas are founded around the principle of ‘means and ends’. We believe that the means we use will condition the ends we achieve. Anarchists want to build a free and democratic workers' society. As a result anarchists use methods that will build this within the struggle for change. Partly as a result of anarchist activity, the workers' movement in Spain was strongly influenced by the practice of democracy - this was a deliberate goal.

Anarchist methods of struggle set out to increase the self-activity and self-confidence of the working-class. For this reason anarchists oppose any involvement with the ‘parliamentary road to socialism’. Parliamentary activity and ‘electioneering’ - in Spain as elsewhere

- increases the passivity of workers and encourages people to believe that ‘someone else’ will bring socialism. Anarchists fundamentally oppose this notion. We know - and history seems to vindicate the view - that ‘the emancipation of the workers can only be carried out by the workers themselves’.

The methods used by anarchists in Spain were conscious and thought-out. They are as relevant now as they were then. The main ones were as follows.

- Direct action was stressed as a means of resolving disputes with the Government and the bosses. Anarchists pointed out that direct action is, firstly, very effective (since it often gets to the root of the problem). Secondly, it increases the confidence of those who struggle by showing them in practice the strength that they have (as a collective body).
- Workplace assemblies were the principal method for decision making in anarchist unions. Anarchists point out that workers are most powerful at their place of work. This is where we must organise. And this is where we must always attempt to implement democracy - not with the bosses but against them.
- Anarchists used delegation not representation as means of getting things done. Anarchists obviously recognised that a mass assembly of people is an unwieldy body for doing a lot of tasks. In a democracy it is natural that we will appoint people to do certain things - this is a vital division of labour that must be used. But this appointment should be on the basis of delegation not representation. Delegates unlike representatives are subject to recall (if they don’t do what they were asked to do by the assembly, they can be relieved of their mandate and their actions reversed). This idea of delegation keeps the power of decision-making at the level of the mass assembly.
- Anti-parliamentarianism. Anarchists actively campaigned against using the Spanish parliament. They argued that the various Socialist and Communist parties in Spain would not bring about real change. Anarchists emphasised that only the workers themselves could do this. Anarchists refused to participate in the Spanish parliamentary process because they believed it would divert or even compromise the ‘revolutionary’ objective. Anti-parliamentarianism was a major part of the democracy movement in Spain.

example. In general, as I think Hegel said, “for every Right there is a Duty”. So, for example, you have the Right to travel on public transport and a Duty to pay your fare. The right to strike implies that workers are allowed to peacefully withdraw their labour in return for respecting public order and generally not doing anything to make the strike effective. What else can it mean? After all, a right is something granted *by law* – you can hardly approach a cop and ask him to protect you while you burn scab lorries.

I think that, in general, demands for rights are an expression of the weakness of our class. Instead of saying to our enemies “if you lay a finger on us you’ll get your fucking head kicked in”, or even just kicking their heads in anyway, we tend to say “please respect our rights, we don’t really mean you any harm”. Of course, our class *is* in a weak position, and there’s no magic answer to this. But I think one step we can take is to recognise that middle-class do-gooders who campaign for rights *are not on our side* – even if some of them are nice lefty lawyers who sometimes get us out of a lot of trouble...

What I’ve said so far probably isn’t *that* controversial. What I have said so far concerns excluding certain categories of people. Wanting to exclude people from democracy is perfectly compatible with being a democrat – it’s amazing how many liberals will say that they unconditionally support freedom of speech and then suddenly change their minds when if someone says “well, what about fascists then?”.

More controversially, I now want to talk about democracy “within in our own ranks” – that is, amongst proletarians in struggle. The usual “workers’ democracy” argument, for example, will say “OK, we don’t have democratic relations with the bourgeoisie but amongst ourselves there should be the most perfect equality and respect for rights.” This is usually seen as a way of avoiding bureaucratisation and domination by small cliques and ensuring that as many people as possible are involved in a particular struggle. The idea is that if people are allowed the right to speak, the right to vote etc., then you can just go along to a meeting and immediately be part of this democratic collectivity and so immediately be involved.

What does democratising a struggle mean in practice? It means things like:

- 1) **Majoritarianism** – Nothing can be done unless a majority agree to it.

a society based on abstract labour. Democracy is often defined as the Rule of the People – the People always being understood as a mass of atomised citizens with rights.

On a very abstract level you can say that capitalism is always democratic. You can say that democracy expresses the essence of capital – if you like putting things in those sort of terms! – that equality is just an expression of the equivalence of commodities.

Marx made the ultimate abusive comment about democracy when he described it as “Christian”:

“Political democracy is Christian inasmuch as it regards man – not just one man but all men – as a sovereign and supreme being; but man in his uncultivated, unsocial aspect, man in his contingent existence, man just as he is, man as he has been corrupted, lost to himself, sold, and exposed to the rule of inhuman conditions and elements by the entire organisation of our society – in a word, man who is not yet a true species-being. The sovereignty of man – but of man as an alien being distinct from actual man – is the fantasy, the dream, the postulate of Christianity, whereas in democracy it is a present and material reality, a secular maxim.”

-----Marx, *On the Jewish Question*

SO WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALL THIS?

The most common ways that the democratic counter-revolution expresses itself in the class struggle is around the questions of *class power* and the *organisation* of that power.

By “class power” I mean the recognition of the fact that we are in a class war situation and that to advance our side in that war and ultimately win it we have to ruthlessly crush and exterminate our enemies. Obviously this implies despotic power in itself. You can’t respect the rights of a cop if you beating him to death! If a trade union leader tries to address a meeting and we respond by shouting him down or dragging him off the stage and kicking his head in, it’s absurd for us to say that we believe in freedom of speech. “The revolution will not be televised” – nor will it be monitored by Amnesty International...

In the same way that we don’t grant rights to our enemies, nor do we ask for rights from our enemies. This is obviously a complicated issue because, in practice, it’s often difficult to distinguish demanding something and demanding a right to it. I won’t try to deal with every aspect of this question. I’ll just look at the Right to Strike as an

The anarchist strategy of direct action and direct democracy in Spain was concretised by the formation of the syndicalist CNT union in 1910. Syndicalism was an attempt to provide a link between the broader anarchist movement and the workers on the shop-floor. Its basic ideas revolved around all the workers being in one big union. All the employees in a workplace would join. They would link up with those in other jobs in the same area, and an area federation would be formed. Delegates from these would go forward to regional federations who were then united into a national federation. All the delegates of the CNT were elected and recallable. They were given a clear mandate and if they broke it they could be replaced with new delegates.

Every effort was made to prevent the growth of a bureaucracy of unaccountable full-time officials. There was only one full-time official in all of the CNT. Union work was done during working hours where possible, otherwise after work. This ensured that the officials of the union stayed in contact with the shop-floor.

The CNT experienced rapid growth from the time of its formation. By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936 it had almost two million members. Its strongholds were in Catalonia and in Andalusia. It also had large followings in Galicia, Asturias, Levant, Saragossa and Madrid. Its main strength was among textile, building and wood workers as well as amongst agricultural labourers. As it preached social revolution it was subject to vicious repression not only under the semi-dictatorship which ruled in Spain until 1931 but also the ‘reforming’ governments which followed. The Popular Front Government in particular, with its social democratic and Stalinist supporters, showed no mercy to the anarchist movement.

The revolution that overtook Spain in July 1936 occurred initially as a response to the attempted coup by the military led by General Franco. The response to the coup in Catalonia, and Aragon and in many other places where the anarchists were strong, was the fruition of years of direct action and direct democracy in the Spanish workers’ movement. Immediately the popular movement that had resisted the fascists moved beyond the notion of restoring ‘parliamentary democracy’ and began to implement a new democratic society.

ON THE LAND: Collectivisation of the land was extensive. Close on two thirds of all land in the Republican zone (that area controlled by the anti-fascist forces) was taken over. In all between five and seven

million peasants were involved. The major areas were Aragon where there were 450 collectives, the Levant (the area around Valencia) with 900 collectives and Castille (the area surrounding Madrid) with 300 collectives. Not only was the land collectivised but in the villages workshops were set up where the local trades-people could produce tools, furniture, etc. Bakers, butchers, barbers and so on also decided to collectivise.

Collectivisation was voluntary and thus quite different from the forced “collectivisation” presided over by Stalin in Russia. Usually a meeting was called in the village (most collectives were centred on a particular village) and all present would agree to pool together whatever land, tools and animals they had. This ‘pool’ would be added to what had already been taken from the big landowners. The land was divided into rational units and groups of workers were assigned to work them. Each group had its delegate who represented their views at meetings of the collective. A management committee was also elected and was responsible for the overall running of the collective. They would look after the buying of materials, exchanges with other areas, distributing the produce and necessary public works such as the building of schools. Each collective held regular general meetings of all its participants. If you didn’t want to join the collective you were given some land but only as much as you could work yourself. You were not allowed to employ workers.

Production was changed by the Revolution but so was distribution. This was altered so as to be on the basis of what people needed. In many areas money was abolished. People come to the collective store (often churches which had been turned into warehouses) and got what was available. If there were shortages, rationing was introduced to ensure that everyone got their fair share. But it was usually the case that production increased under the new system, thereby eliminating shortages.

In agricultural terms the revolution occurred at a good time. Harvests that would normally have been sold off to make big profits for a few landowners were instead distributed to those in need. Doctors, bakers, barbers, etc. were given what they needed in return for their services. Where money was not abolished a ‘family wage’ was introduced so that payment was on the basis of need and not the number of hours worked.

Production increased greatly. Technicians and agronomists helped the peasants to make better use of the land. Modern scientific

AGAINST DEMOCRACY

from Wildcat (UK)

[This is the text of a introductory talk which was given to two discussion meetings held in London and Brighton in 1993. It’s been typed up and made available to the communist public due to massive popular demand.]

The purpose of this little talk is to convince you that revolutionaries should oppose democracy in it all its forms.

Before we go any further, I want to get the argument about the use of words out of the way. A lot of people will agree with a lot of what I’m saying (or will think that they do!) but will say “Ah, Yes, but what you’re talking about is bourgeois democracy. What *I* mean by democracy is something quite different.” I want to suggest that when people talk about “real” or “workers” democracy in opposition to bourgeois democracy, in fact they *do* mean the same thing that the bourgeoisie mean by democracy, despite superficial differences. The fact that they chose to use the word democracy is actually far more significant than they claim. This is why it is important to say “Death to democracy!”. A less obscure analogy might be that of the word “development”. Third Worldist lefties will generally say that they are in favour of development. When you say “Isn’t that what the IMF want?”, they’ll say “No, we want *real* development”. When you talk to them a bit more you find out that in fact they do want the same as the IMF... it’s just that the IMF have got a more realistic understanding of what it means.

My basic contention here will be that however much you claim to be against property (as Lenino-Trotsky-Stalinists do) or even against the state (as anarchists do), if you support democracy you *are* actually for property and for the state.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

In the most general terms, democracy is the rule of rights and equality. It’s pretty easy to see that this is capitalist. “Rights” implies the existence of atomised individuals in competition with each other. It also implies the existence of the state, or some quasi-state form of authority, which can guarantee people’s rights. “Equality” implies the existence of a society in which people can have equal worth – that is,

Spain which could have been implemented if the revolution had been successful.

The importance of the workers' collectives in Spain lie in the example that they provide. Elitist opinion since time immemorial has portrayed 'popular rule' as an impossibility on the one hand, or as a state of affairs that is likely to result in a shambles, on the other. The workers of Spain showed this to be entirely false - and showed this on a grand scale. Now as much as then, they offer us a concrete idea of how society can be organised by workers in a democratic and free way. This is viable alternative.

Despite the power of such an example we are still faced with a difficult and tough struggle ahead - how to end the capitalist system with its greed, its misery and its competition. Now is as good a time as any to consider how we should conduct this struggle, what its aims should be, and what methods we should use. We must aim for revolution and we must aim for real democracy. These are the essential goals, the points that we must reach before we can ever change anything. To do this, we argue as anarchists that we must build where we are actually strong - at work and in the community. Our methods must build on class solidarity, they must use direct action, they must aim to increase the self-activity of workers and the poor; they must always encourage participation.

About one thing we have no doubts. Parliament will not bring us the change that we now need. Parliament is a means of diffusing democracy, of channelling real struggles into a safe dead-end. Time and time again it has become a graveyard for the workers' movement. That is a mistake we must not repeat again.

methods were introduced and in some areas yields increased by as much as 50%. There was enough to feed the collectivists and the militias in their areas. Often there was enough for exchange with other collectives in the cities for machinery. In addition food was handed over to the supply committees who looked after distribution in the urban areas.

Federations of collectives were established, the most successful being in Aragon. In June 1937 a plenum of Regional Federations of Peasants was held. Its aim was the formation of a national federation 'for the co-ordination and extension of the collectivist movement and also to ensure an equitable distribution of the produce of the land, not only between the collectives but for the whole country'. Unfortunately many collectives were smashed, not by Franco's army but by the soldiers of the Stalinist General Lister, before this could be done.

The collectivists were not only concerned with their material well being. They had a deep commitment to education and as a result of their efforts many children received an education for the first time. This was not the usual schooling either. The methods of Francisco Ferrer, the world famous anarchist educationalist, were employed. Children were given basic literacy skills and after that inquisitive skills were encouraged. Old people were also looked after and where necessary special homes for them were built. Refugees from the fascist controlled areas were looked after too.

IN THE CITY: In industry the situation was a little different. The collectivisation was not as extensive in urban areas but it still occurred on a huge scale. In Barcelona over 3,000 enterprises were collectivised. All the public services, not only in Catalonia but throughout the Republican zone, were taken over and run by committees of workers.

To give some idea of the extent of the collectivisation here is a list provided by one observer. He says

'railways, traincars and buses, taxicabs and shipping, electric light and power companies, gasworks and waterworks, engineering and automobile assembly plants, mines and cement works, textile mills and paper factories, electrical and chemical concerns, glass bottle factories and perfumeries, food processing plants and breweries were confiscated and controlled by workmen's (sic) committees, either term possessing for the owners almost equal significance ... Motion picture theatres and legitimate theatres, newspapers and printing, shops, department stores and hotels, deluxe restaurants and bars were likewise sequestered.'

Often the workplaces were seized because the owners had fled or had stopped production to sabotage the revolution. But the workers did not stop with these workplaces - all major places of work were taken over. Some were run and controlled by the workers. In others “control committees” were established to ensure that production was maintained (these existed to exercise a power of veto on the decisions of the boss in cases where the workers had not taken over the actual power of management).

In each workplace an assembly of all the workers was the basic unit. Within the factory workers would elect delegates to represent them on day-to-day issues. Anything of overall importance had to go to the assembly. This would elect a committee of between five and fifteen workers, which would elect a manager to oversee the day-to-day running of the workplace. Within each industry there was an Industrial Council which had representatives of the two main unions (CNT and UGT) and representatives from the committees. Technicians were also on these committees to provide technical advice. The job of the Industrial Council was to set out an overall plan for the industry.

The Barcelona trams are a good example of what workers achieved when they took over:

Out of the 7,000 workers on the tramways at the time of the Revolution, some 6,500 were members of the CNT. Because of the street battles, all transport had been brought to a halt. The transport syndicate (as unions of the CNT were known) appointed a commission of seven to occupy the administrative offices while others inspected the tracks and drew up a plan of repair work that needed to be done. Five days after the fighting stopped 700 tramcars, instead of the usual 600, all painted in the black and red colours of the CNT, were operating on the streets of Barcelona.

With the profit motive gone, safety became more important and the number of accidents was reduced. Fares were lowered and services improved. In 1936, over 183 million passengers were carried. By 1937 this had gone up to over 233 million. The trams were running so efficiently that the workers were able to give money to other sections of urban transport. Wages were equalised for all workers and increased over the previous rates. For the first time free medical care was provided for the work force.

Extensive reorganisation took place to make industry more efficient. Many uneconomic small plants, which were usually unhealthy, were closed down and production was concentrated in those plants with the best equipment. In Catalonia 70 foundries were closed down. The number of

tanning plants was reduced from 71 to 40 and the whole wood industry was reorganised by the CNT Woodworkers Union.

In 1937 the central government admitted that the war industry of Catalonia produced ten times more than the rest of Spanish industry put together and that this output could have been quadrupled if Catalonia had the access to the necessary means of purchasing raw materials.

As with the examples of rural collectivisation, distribution was also changed. Many parasitic ‘middlemen’ were cut out of distribution. The wholesale business in fish and eggs was taken over as were the principal fruit and vegetable markets. The milk trade in Barcelona was collectivised which saw over 70 un-hygienic pasteurising plants closed down. Everywhere supply committees were set up. All of this made the middle classes very unhappy. To them, with their notions of becoming bigger bosses, the revolution was a step backwards.

Equalisation funds were established to help out the poorer collectives. Indeed there were many problems. Many markets were cut off in the fascist zone and some foreign markets were also temporarily lost. Raw materials were often scarce, as sources of supply had been cut off; there was the added problem that money was held back from the collectives by the central government (for political reasons). This was one serious, though artificial, short-coming of the collectivisation - its lack of credit facilities which would have allowed investment and future planning. (During the Revolution the banks had not been seized and the gold reserve already referred to stayed in the hands of the government. The CNT did hatch a plan to seize it, but backed down at the last moment).

Despite all this, production was increased and living standards for many working class people improved. In October 1936 the government was forced to recognise the collectivisation by passing a decree that recognised the fait accompli. It was also an attempt to control future collectivisation.

This is only a very brief look at the collectivisation that happened. But in keeping with anarchist beliefs the revolution did not stop there. For the first time in Spain many workers had the benefit of a health service - organised by the CNT Federation of Health Workers. The Federation consisted of 40,000 health workers - nurses, doctors, administrators and orderlies. Once again the major success was in Catalonia where it ensured that all of the 2.5 million inhabitants had adequate health care. Victims of the Civil War were also treated. A programme of preventive medicine was also established based on local community health centres. At their 1937 Congress these workers developed a health plan for a future anarchist