

## Unit 3: The First International

### This Unit aims to:

- Show how the First International developed
- Examine the differences between the libertarian (anarchist) and authoritarian (Marxist) wings of the International
- Discuss the development of a coherent anarchist political theory looking at the concepts of equality, freedom, society and organization
- Analyse the split and eventual demise of the First International.

### Terms and abbreviations

**Transitional period:** This was the time between the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a true communist society. During this period Marx argued that the state would have to be captured and used as an instrument of change. He said a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' would be established to create the economic conditions to achieve 'full communism'. In other words, the state would 'wither away' when the 'government of people' gave way to the 'administration of things'.

**Pan-German peoples' state:** The idea, strongly influenced by the intellectual currents of 19<sup>th</sup> Century nationalism, of uniting under common political institutions all people with a common language and belonging to a common race.

**Social Contract:** First introduced into political theory by Plato and since used to base all ideas of legitimacy and political obligation on a contract between the individual and the sovereign state. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, amongst others, used the idea in various ways. The classic liberal view is that the state is justifiable only as a system of constraints on the activities of individuals to protect their freedoms and rights.

## Introduction

Unit 2 highlighted some of the tactics developed by the working class in 18th Century Britain that would later contribute to anarcho-syndicalism. During that period however, the dominant idea was that political change would only come about through reform, in the guise of more representative government. The Chartists' main aim was greater political equality through the extension of the vote. Many workers recognised the corrupt, unrepresentative government, but failed to recognise the importance of the inequalities of the economic system as a major source of oppression.

However, as capitalist exploitation grew in the 19th Century, the focus shifted towards economic inequality. A growing number of workers realised that political reform was not enough, and that working class emancipation could only come about with the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by an economic system based on collective ownership. Increasingly, the labour movement of the 19th Century was characterised by growing polarisation of two approaches; (1) political reform leading to economic change towards collective ownership, and; (2) the replacement of parliament altogether with a collective system based on direct control by the working class.

Much of the impetus for the second approach stemmed from disillusionment with the idea that changing the political system could bring real change to living conditions. In particular, there was widespread anger that the establishment of a revolutionary government in France in 1848 had resulted in yet more repression, not a more egalitarian society. Increasingly, workers rallied to the idea that "*the emancipation of the workers must be the task of workers themselves*". This led some of them to adopt and develop methods of direct action as a way in which the struggle against capitalism could be kept under workers' control, instead of relying on politicians to act on their behalf.

The founding of the First International is of crucial importance in the development of anarcho-syndicalism, for two reasons. Firstly, the ideas formulated by the anarchist wing of the International laid down some of the basic concepts of anarcho-syndicalism. Secondly, the split in the First International was not merely about abstract political argument unconnected with everyday reality; it was about two very different visions of a future socialist society.

This Unit examines the events around the First International,

## The Marxist position

concentrating on the different approaches of the Marxists and anarchists. In doing so, we shall concentrate on the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin, one of the main protagonists in the anarchist side of the split. However, it is important to point out that Bakunin was not a leader of anarchist groups or ideas, nor did he see himself as such. In his writing, Bakunin simply articulates the ideas of the many workers who opposed the Marxist programme.

## The First International

The First International (or International Working Men's Association) was founded in London in 1864, largely at the instigation of Karl Marx and his followers. Although Marx was undoubtedly the 'midwife' in the International's formation, the idea for it had come from the workers themselves. As Bakunin wrote:

*"The International Working Men's Association did not spring ready-made out of the minds of a few erudite theoreticians. It developed out of the actual economic necessities, out of the bitter tribulations the workers were forced to endure and the natural impact of these trials upon the minds of the toilers".*

Within eight years, the First International attracted over a million members and was becoming a true force for revolutionary change. However, it was deeply divided. Although after some debate it unanimously endorsed the principle of collective ownership, disagreement as to how this would be achieved soon became evident.

Whereas the German, English and (German-speaking) Swiss groups favoured the Marxists' state-communist, centralist programme, the Belgian, French, Spanish, and (French-speaking) Swiss groups favoured the anarchist approach and argued for federalism, based on workers' direct control.

At the heart of the Marxist argument was Marx's idea that "*the conquest of political power is the first task of the proletariat*". They argued that this would lead to workers taking control of the state, through which capitalism would be abolished. The Marxists' main aim, therefore, was the formation of political groups whose goal was to capture state power through the establishment of a workers' government. Once in control of government, the workers would use the power of the state to expropriate land and industry from the capitalists and landowners. The economy would then be administered by the state for the benefit of the working class. If the workers could not win control through the electoral process, then there must be a political revolution to seize state power, establishing a government based on the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*". The concept at the centre of Marxist thinking was that social revolution could only occur after the political revolution, based on winning control of the state.

The Marxist German Social Democratic Party, founded in 1869, reflected these ideas. Their programme argued that "*the conquest of political power was the indispensable condition for the economic emancipation of the proletariat*" and so the immediate objective of the party must be to organise a legal campaign to win universal suffrage and other political rights. Their final objective was the establishment of a Pan-German peoples' state.

The idea that social revolution could come about through state control relied heavily on the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism. This is based on the premise that the nature of an economic system determines the nature of society as a whole. As such, political and social conditions are determined by the economy. To change the latter one has only to change the former and so the very act of the workers abolishing capitalism and taking control of the economy would automatically end exploitation and bring about social and political equality.

Determinism also extended to Marxist theories of the state. The state was seen as the agent of the dominant economic class, administering society on its behalf. Once capitalism was abolished, and the economy was under collective ownership, the state would become the tool of the workers, and could begin to administer the economy on their behalf. A further argument used by Marxists was that the economy would have to come under state control initially, as

## Anarchist Collectivism

workers did not have the expertise to run society. They saw this '*dictatorship of the proletariat*' as purely a '*transitional period*', during which workers would be trained to take over the running of society directly. The state under socialism would eventually become redundant and '*wither away*'.

The anarchist wing of the First International, although seeking the same end-point of an egalitarian society, proposed a very different method for achieving it. They opposed a purely political programme aimed at capturing state power, and rejected outright the idea that workers should support parliamentary candidates and campaign for political reform. They also rejected the notion of political revolutions aimed at establishing workers' government.

The anarchists held that political rights, such as freedom of association, should not be isolated from the economic struggle: these rights, they argued, could only be guaranteed *through* economic struggle. Therefore, they rejected purely political struggle such as the formation of workers' political parties. Instead, they advocated workers' self-organisation into economic organisations (unions), which would use direct action to fight for economic and social change to collective ownership.

The aim of these unions was to constantly link the day-to-day struggle for improvements to the wider struggle against capitalism. In the short term, they would organise strikes and other direct actions against capitalism. In the longer term, this constant struggle would lead to the social general strike, during which capitalism would be overthrown and replaced with a society in which workers would control their industries and communities.

The anarchist programme was described by the Alliance, the Geneva section of the International:

*"The Alliance rejects all political action which does not have for its immediate and direct aim the triumph of the workers over capitalism. Consequently it fixes as its ultimate aim the abolition of the state, all states, to be replaced by a universal federation of local associations through and in freedom."*

The emphasis on "freedom" in the Alliance programme is important, for this notion of freedom lay at the centre of anarchist thinking. It was also what distinguished anarchism from Marxism. Although anarchists within the International accepted Marxist economic arguments, they argued that not all inequality is rooted in economic inequality. It could also stem from unequal power relations under which an individual, or groups of individuals, could coerce others. They argued that to prevent this, society must be organised democratically, based on free association.

To the anarchists, the essence of a future society would be the ability for people to come together voluntarily, on equal terms, to decide what is best for them as a whole. They argued that if society was not based on free association, and if human relations were not conducted freely, equally and without coercion, then an unequal society based on unequal power relations would develop.

The anarchists argued that any new society, rather than being administered from the top down, must be administered directly by the workers from the bottom up. In other words, people must come together on equal terms to decide their collective needs and how best to meet them. If this process was not followed, and power remained in the hands of a few, then social inequality would persist.

In arguing that not all inequality originated from the economic system, the anarchists challenged Marxist economic determinism. They also rejected the idea that the state could be used as a tool for workers' emancipation. For the anarchists, the fact that a capitalist parliament would have been eliminated was not enough to guarantee that the state would act in the interests of workers. They argued that state control, by its very nature, was based on the rule of the minority over the majority.

Moreover, the anarchists scorned Marx's view that under the 'people's state' following the take-over he envisaged, *'the proletariat would be elevated to the status of the governing class'*. If the working class (the overwhelming majority of the population) were to become the governing class, then who, the anarchists asked, would they be ruling over?

For the anarchists, the prospect of the state abolishing market capitalism and private ownership did not mean the state would act any differently towards bringing about social equality. They dismissed as naive and patronising the Marxist idea that, under the new workers' state, *'learned socialists'* would administer society on the workers' behalf. Instead, they predicted, the *'learned socialists'* would be more likely to use their power to form a new ruling elite and so the Marxist state would not be based on the dictatorship of the proletariat, but on the dictatorship of a new privileged political-scientific' class of learned socialists. According to the anarchists, while the current state exercised power over the majority based on their ownership of the economy, the new socialist dictators would also base their power over the majority on their ultimate control of the economy. The result

would be that social equality would remain a workers dream.

The anarchists believed that state power, whether based on a constitutional assembly or a revolutionary dictatorship, was the rule of a minority over a majority, and was therefore undemocratic. No matter what form the state took, those appointed to run and administer it would function as a ruling class, assuming in the process the power and the privilege of a ruling class. As such, the state would not be merely the agent of the particular class that happens to own the means of production. Rather, the state was viewed as a class in itself, acting on its own behalf. Furthermore, a ruling class, based on state control, would have the means to become one of the most powerful elites in history, for the Marxist state would not only control the economy, but the whole state apparatus, including the army and police.

The anarchists argued that the programme that the Marxists wished the First International to adopt, based on "The Communist Manifesto" written by Marx and Engels, would not lead to workers' emancipation, but to their enslavement. As Bakunin pointed out;

*"the construction of a powerful centralised revolutionary state would inevitably lead to the establishment of a military dictatorship...it would again condemn the masses, governed by edict, to immobility...to slavery and exploitation by a new quasi-revolutionary aristocracy"*.

This turned out to be a chilling prediction of the future Soviet state. For the anarchists then, the state is oppressive by its very nature, since it is based on the rule of a minority over the majority. Thus, the root cause of the trouble for people, as Bakunin put it;

*"does not lie in any particular form of government but in the fundamental principle of government and the very existence of government no matter what form it might take"*.

# Anarchism & Individualism

The anarchist core beliefs of rejection of state power and emphasis on free association were developed at the time of the International and have characterised anarchism since. As a result, opponents have claimed that anarchism is nothing more than a radical form of liberal individualism, which places individual liberty before the needs of society as a whole. This misrepresents the anarchist arguments.

The anarchist notion of individual liberty was based on ideas put forward during the 1848 revolution in France, the rallying cry of which was *'the slavery of the least of men is the slavery of all'*. They argued that individual liberty was based on collective liberty; because human beings can only confirm their humanity within society, so the freedom of others is merely a reflection of one's own freedom. In short, it is impossible to be free unless all others around you are free. In Bakunin's words:

*"I am truly free only when all human beings are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary condition and confirmation."*

The anarchists dismissed the liberal notion of the individual, which, they argued, was rooted in the Christian idea that people were not created by society, but by God, outside of and apart from it. Accordingly, liberal social democratic thinking saw humans as pre-dating society: it was not society who created humans, but humans who created society. Within this thinking, society is merely a loose collection of individuals who come together to perform specific functions, such as work, etc. The most important function of society for the liberal is to limit the freedom of the individual. This is because our free will, motivated by pure self-interest, would lead us to attack others to meet our immediate needs. To ensure this, a *'social contract'* between humans was observed and enforced, and so the state was created as an outside authority to regulate human relations. Should this authority be taken away, so the theory goes, then we would return to our natural state and chaos would ensue. Thus, liberal social democratic thinking based on individualism viewed society as a contract not to rip each other apart.

The anarchists, however, put forward a very different view of human development. They saw humans as a product of society, without which they could not exist. They argued that humans only

emerged from a state of brutality through collective organisation and labour, through which they were able to create the conditions that allowed their mutual emancipation. In other words, humans were only humanised and emancipated by forming a society. Humanity was therefore created by society and it is only in society that we become human. Placed outside of society we would not be human - alone, able to speak and think, but conscious only of (one)self. Bakunin summed up human development as follows:

*"Man becomes conscious of himself and his humanity only in society and only by the collective action of the whole of society. He freed himself from the yoke of external nature only by collective and social labour, which alone can transform the Earth into an abode favourable to the development of humanity. Without such material emancipation the intellectual and moral emancipation of the individual is impossible. He can emancipate himself from the yoke of his own nature, i.e. subordinate his instincts and movements of his body to the conscious direction of his mind, the development of which is fostered only by education and training. But education and training are pre-eminently and exclusively social, hence isolated individuals cannot possibly become conscious of their freedom."*

For the anarchists then, all human development, intellectual, moral and material, was the product of human society. As such, progress was based on co-operation within society. It was logical and natural for humans to come together in a free federation of common interests, aspirations and tendencies; indeed, this is the only way to create a society capable of collectively providing the education, training and material prosperity to ensure that each individual developed their faculties and powers to the full.

# Anarchist Society

Anarchism therefore rejected both individualism and state collectivism, since both suppress individual liberty. In an anarchist society, the full development of the individual would depend on the collective provision of the necessary means, and on full social and economic equality. However, the continuation and development of the collective society would depend on the individual being able to participate in it fully and equally, with the aim of developing their full potential. Without individual liberty, social equality would be unattainable, and without social equality, there could not be individual liberty.

In place of the all-powerful state that imposed authority from above, the anarchists of the First International developed a view of a society governed by natural laws, *'made up of customs, traditions and moral norms acquired and expanded through the ages in the course and practice of daily life'*. By 'natural', they did not mean that society, or people, are somehow naturally 'good'. They argued that society could be either good or bad, and humans, shaped by society, could be good or bad. As Bakunin put it: *"A man born into a society of brutes tends to become a brute; born into a society of thieves, he tends to become a thief"*. The 'nature' of society depended on the material, intellectual and ethical levels of its members.

Anarchism therefore viewed the society-individual relationship as a symbiotic, mutual one. Anarchists sought a form of society where the conditions are continuously being created for every individual to reach their full potential. In reaching their full potential, they would be expanding the sum of human knowledge, which would, in turn, expand the potential of the individual.

As the Alliance (of Geneva) argued within the First International:

*"The children of both sexes must, from birth, be provided with equal means and opportunities for their full development, i.e. support, upbringing and education at all levels of science, industry and art. For we are convinced that next to social equality, it will lead to greater and increasing natural freedom of individuals and result in the abolition of artificial and imposed inequalities - the historic source of unjust social organisation"*.

Besides the need for society to provide the means for individual development, the point was stressed that individual development leads to greater freedom and to social equality. Although society

could collectively provide the democratic structures through which, as individuals, people could participate in the collective running of society, it was only when people felt equal that they could participate on equal terms. Therefore, the anarchists reasoned, it was only in a society that sought maximum individual development, that social equality could be ensured.

For the anarchists the starting point from which conditions of equality could be created was the overthrow of capitalism. From the initial onset of the revolution, society had to be run on democratic principles with the aim of seeking social equality. They argued that, rather than the revolution leading to state control based on inequality, workers themselves should take over the practical running of society. Workers should;

*"..take possession of all the tools of production as well as all the buildings and factories, arming and organising themselves into regional sections made up of all groups based on street and neighbourhood boundaries. These federally organised sections would then associate themselves to form a federated commune."*

# Anarchist Organisation

The anarchists argued for organisation at street, area, regional, national and international level. Each would retain the maximum degree of local autonomy, ensuring democracy and equality. Decisions affecting only those at street level would be made at street level; decisions affecting regional level would be made at regional level, and so on, from the bottom up. The basic democratic building block would be the meeting, with people coming together to decide their wants and needs.

As well as organisation by locality, anarchists also called for organisation based on industry and interest groups. Workers, for example in the rail industry, would meet in their immediate workplace to decide how best to run that workplace. They would meet with passenger groups to decide the level of service needed. They would meet with railway workers in the immediate area to co-ordinate local services, and railway workers at regional, national and international levels to co-ordinate a national and international service. They would also meet with other workers and passengers to co-ordinate an integrated local, regional, national and international transport system.

The society envisaged by the anarchists was highly pluralistic. People would organise themselves in a myriad of different organisations to cater for emotional, physical and intellectual needs. It would be a society in which *'the infinite needs of man will be reflected in an adequate variety of organisations'*.

However, while their view of the free society was far-reaching, they were not so naïve as to think it would emerge overnight. True equality based on free and equal association would not come easily. Their argument was threefold; that the fight for a new society would have to start immediately; that it must be built within the existing society; that the form and methods of workers' organisations must reflect the society they hoped to build after the revolution. By constructing organisations on anarchist principles, workers would create, within the shell of the old society, the structure of a new social order. The unions and local organisations advocated by the anarchists were therefore much more than mere organs of struggle. They were the means by which workers would educate themselves and develop democratic structures and methods. They would develop a democratic culture based on egalitarian principles and so be used as the basis on which to create and administer a new form of society.

The anarchists therefore argued that the First International should be made up of economic organisations (unions) and run in a way that reflected the form of the future society they hoped to build. The International would then be in a position to bring together and organise the mass of the people, and to educate workers through linking the day-to-day struggle to the wider revolutionary struggle. Of this organisational concept, Bakunin wrote:

*"..trade sections and their representatives in the Chapel of Labour create a great academy in which all workers can and must study economic science; these sections also are themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but the facts of the future itself."*

## Direct Action

It was from this period of the First International that direct action became a key concept that separated anarchism from all other movements, both reformist and revolutionary. Rudolf Rocker provided a brief definition in 1936:

*"By direct action the anarcho-syndicalists mean every method of immediate warfare against their economic and political oppressors. Among the outstanding are: the strike, in all its gradations from simple wage-struggle to general strike; the boycott; sabotage in countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda; and peculiarly in cases..... armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty."*

While Rocker was writing many years after the First International, this definition remains true to the interpretation of the anarchists at the time. Indeed, it remains largely relevant today, although many more tactics can now be added.

## First International: Death Throes

The decisive split in the First International thus occurred over the confrontation between the anarchists who maintained it should be made up of unions in economic struggle, and the Marxists, who advocated political groups united by a political programme. The anarchists argued bitterly that the Marxist approach would turn the International into a mere talking shop, limiting activity to campaigning. Even more unacceptably to them, instead of a unified workers' movement it would create a party of elite workers, led by socialist intellectuals, separated from the workers' day-to-day struggles. They pointed out that these more 'advanced' workers would form the new elite in the future state system.

The central tenets of anarchism had been established - that the means must reflect the ends, and that theory and practice are interdependent and must be combined. The anarchists argued that only a democratically organised mass movement could lead to a democratic revolutionary society and predicted that the Marxist form of organising, in which advanced workers came together in a purely political organisation, was hierarchical and could only result in a future hierarchical society. On theory and practice, they maintained that anarchist ideas depend on, and can only be developed by, organisations whose day-to-day practice reflects anarchist principles.

Within the dying International, the administration of the Marxist and anarchist wings reflected their conceptual approaches. Peter Kropotkin provided an eyewitness account giving an insight into how the two wings operated. On arriving in Switzerland from his native Russia, Kropotkin first aligned himself with the Marxist group in Geneva. However, he soon became disillusioned with the way the needs of the politicians took precedence over those of the workers. After attending a meeting at which the leadership argued against a proposed building strike as it might affect electoral prospects, he decided to contact the anarchists in Geneva who were centred on the Swiss watch industry in the Jura Mountains. On his first encounter with them he noted:

*"The separation between the leaders and workers which I had noticed at Geneva in the Temple Unique (the Marxist section) did not exist in the Jura Mountains...the absence of division between the leaders and the masses in the Jura federation was the reason why there was not a question upon which every member of the federation would not*

*strive to form his own independent opinion. Here I saw that the workers were not a mass that was being led and being made subservient to the political ends of a few men; their leaders were simply their more active comrades."*

His brief stay with the Jura workers converted Kropotkin to the cause of anarchism. It is interesting to see that it was not just the ideas that attracted him, but the way the organisations conducted themselves, reflecting the fact that theory and practice are inseparable in anarchism. He summed up his conversion thus:

*"The theoretical aspects of anarchism, as they were beginning to be expressed in the Jura Federation, especially by Bakunin; the criticisms of state socialism, the fear of an economic despotism, which I heard formulated there; and the revolutionary character of the agitation, appealed strongly to my mind. But the egalitarian relations which I found in the Jura Mountains, the independence of thought and expression which I saw developing in the workers...appealed far more strongly to my feelings...my views upon socialism were settled; I became an anarchist"*.

The split within the First International came to a head in 1872. A conference at The Hague, amid various manoeuvres by the Marxists, expelled a number of anarchists. The events surrounding the Hague conference typify the differences between the two wings.

The defeat of the Paris Commune prevented the congress taking place in Paris in 1870 as planned. In 1871 the General Council of the International met in London. Bakunin and the anarchists of the Jura Federation were not invited and in the absence of opposition Marx was able to get the General Council of the International to accept appropriation of state power as an integral part of the programme of the International. The congress was moved to the Hague, where in 1872, Marx attended in person for the first time. Bakunin and many anarchists were unable to attend because of the dangers of crossing French and German territory. At least five of the delegates forming the Marxist majority, as the labour historian G.D.H. Cole observed, *"represented non-existent movements or nearly so"*. Marx and Engels accused Bakunin of being a Russian spy and unscrupulous with money. They also accused him of organizing a secret society to seize control of the International. Paul Lafargue,

## Conclusion

who happened to be Marx's son-in-law, was the principal source of this information, none of which was ever proven. Lack of proof in relation to Lafargue's claims, and his relationship to Marx engendered deep suspicion on the part of the anarchists.

The Congress endorsed the principle of political action through socialist parties. It also extended the powers of the General Council, controlled by Marx, and finally agreed to Marx's proposal that the headquarters of the International be moved from London to New York to, as Marx stated, "*guard the International against elements of disintegration*". There was opposition, not only from the anarchists present, but also from British trade unionists who, while they supported the anarchists in little else, were worried by the centralisation of power. Bakunin and a close associate James Guillaume were expelled. In the view of the Institute of Marxist Leninism this:

*"led to a clearly defined demarcation in the International between the genuine proletarian revolutionary forces and the various shades of petty-bourgeois sectarianism, pseudo-revolutionism and bourgeois reformism."*

The anarchists were effectively barred from the International. The General Council removed itself to New York, where it was largely isolated from European worker activities. This split, and the removal of the General Council, proved fatal to the International: without the anarchists' support, it collapsed. The Hague debacle of 1872 was to prove the last Congress of the First International.

The split between anarchism and Marxism was inevitable. They provided two fundamentally different ways forward for the working class, which in turn led to the historical split in the workers' movement between Marxists, who favoured centralism and state control, and anarchists, who argued for federalism and direct workers' control. At first, the conflict between the two currents remained submerged as they fought together to establish acceptance for the idea of collective ownership. However, within the First International, the differences broke out into a bitter argument, leading to its collapse.

During the short life of the First International, anarchism continued to develop into an increasingly coherent set of ideas. After its demise, the anarchists set about putting these into practice. The immediate result was the rapid growth of an anarchist-influenced workers' movement that was eventually to number millions and extend to most parts of the world. Not surprisingly, it was confronted by both the state and the Marxists, and a pattern of workers' direct action and state brutal repression developed, starting in France in the last years of the 19th Century. Unit 4 charts this wave of French workers' struggle, and its contribution to the further development of anarcho-syndicalism.

## Key points

- The early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of the idea that revolutionary change, rather than parliamentary reform, was needed to establish a socialist society
- With the founding of the First International two distinct movements, one based on the writings of Karl Marx the other on anarchism, argued for fundamentally different approaches to how to achieve revolutionary change
- The friction between the two movements, one centralist and authoritarian the other federalist and libertarian, caused the inevitable split and subsequent demise of the International
- The basic tenets of anarchism were developed and defined during this period.

## Checklist

1. What were the main differences between the two wings of the First International?
2. Why did the anarchists find the Marxist position unacceptable, in spite of the aims of both wings to create an egalitarian society?
3. What, according to Christian-influenced liberal thinking at the time of the First International, is the main purpose of the state?
4. Why did Peter Kropotkin become disillusioned with Marxism? What reasons did he give for his conversion to the cause of anarchism?
5. What type of organisation(s) did the anarchists argue for?
6. Upon what, according to early anarchist thinking, did the freedom of the individual depend?

## Answer suggestions

1. *What were the main differences between the two wings of the First International?*

The Marxists favoured a state-communist, centralist programme and argued for the formation of political groups for the conquest of state power. This would see the establishment of a workers' government to bring about the economic emancipation of the working class. In the short term this included campaigns to win universal suffrage and other political rights. The anarchists favoured workers' control and a federalist approach. They opposed a purely political programme, rejected campaigns for political reforms and standing candidates for parliament, and stood against any notion of establishing a workers' state. Instead they proposed that workers' organisations or unions would agitate and organise strikes and direct action against the capitalist state. In the longer term these struggles would lead to the social general strike during which capitalism would be overthrown and workers' control of industries and communities established.

2. *Why did the anarchists find the Marxist position unacceptable, in spite of the aims of both wings to create an egalitarian society?*

The anarchists could not accept the Marxist idea of establishing political parties to seize control of the state. They argued that this would create an elite group of intellectuals or learned socialists separate from the day-to-day struggles of majority of workers. They also stated that the seizing of state power would not lead to the state withering away and the creation of an egalitarian society. Rather it would see the construction of a dictatorship of the party over the workers.

3. *What, according to Christian-influenced liberal thinking at the time of the First International, is the main purpose of the state?*

Liberal individualism saw humans as being created by God as free spirits and pre-dating any form of society. Motivated by self-interest, people would attack each other to ensure individual needs. A social contract is therefore needed whereby the state is able to regulate human relations to ensure the smooth running of society.

4. *Why did Peter Kropotkin become disillusioned with Marxism? What reasons did he give for his conversion to the cause of anarchism?*

Kropotkin became disillusioned with the way the needs of the politicians seemed to take precedence over the needs of the workers. With the Jura Federation he did not see the divisions between the more active members and the mass of the workers. Besides this organisational aspect he was influenced by the revolutionary character of the agitation and was also swayed by the independence of thought and expression.

5. *What type of organisation(s) did the anarchists argue for?*

They proposed organisations at street, area, regional, national and international level. They also argued for organisations based on industries, in the form of unions, and interest groups. These would be based on direct democracy with decision making taking place from the bottom up. The basic building block would be the meeting where people would come together to decide their wants and needs.

6. *Upon what, according to early anarchist thinking, did the freedom of the individual depend?*

The anarchist notion of individual liberty was based on collective liberty. So, because human beings can only confirm their humanity within society, the freedom of others is merely a reflection of one's own freedom. In this way it is impossible to be free if others around you are not free.

(Cont'd..)

## Some discussion points

- What are the implications for contemporary societies, of the idea of 'free association' as originally formulated within the First International?
- In which ways do the 'means' change the 'ends' in terms of projects that aim to bring about social equality for all?
- The Marxist misrepresentation, at the time of the First International, of the anarchists' aims and beliefs seem oddly persistent, and typical of the type of misrepresentation these are subject to even today. Why, do you think, is anarchism often misrepresented as 'each person for themselves' with the weaker members of society being left unprotected?

## Further Reading

**P. Kropotkin. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. Black Rose. ISBN 0921 689187. £11.99. -AK- -LI-**

Excellent, eye witness accounts of the debate within the First International. Peter Kropotkin arrived from Russia a Marxist, visited the two sides of the split, and converted to join the anarchists. Detailed accounts of the debates and issues. Older prints may be found in libraries (eg. Constable and Co. 1971. ISBN 0486 224856 - same title as above).

**Sam Dolgoff (ed). *Bakunin on Anarchism*. Black Rose Books, 1972. ISBN 0919 619059. £12.99 -AK-**

Contains most of Bakunin's writing, with a commentary and introduction by Dolgoff. While Bakunin by no means a 'pure' anarcho-syndicalist (if they exist), he did nevertheless help formulate and record some of the key fundamentals, as contained here. Centres on the key arguments between the Marxist and anarchist tendencies within the First International.

**Daniel Guerin (ed), *No Gods No Masters Book One*, AK Press. ISBN 873176643. £11.95. -AK-**

Excellent new anthology which collects contemporary material from the period, including lots of previously unpublished works from the period by Bakunin, Proudhon etc. For example: Bakunin's writings 'On Co-operation', 'Worker Association and Collective Ownership', 'The Excommunication of The Hague' and 'Statism and Anarchy' and James Guillaume's 'Ideas on Social Organisation', written in 1876.

**Brian Morris. *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*. Black Rose Books. ISBN 1895 431662. £10.99. -AK-**

Historical biography of Bakunin, with short extracts of his work and ideas. Well written, accessible, and rare as a modern account written by a historian and thinker with a libertarian perspective.

**K. Marx. *Political Writings Vol. 3: First International & After*. Penguin Classics. ISBN 0140 445730. -LI- -BS-**

Marx on Marx - what more is there to say? The original, anti-anarchist perspective from the period of the First International.

**R. M. Cutler. The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871. Prometheus Books. ISBN 0879 757450. -LI- -BS-**

A special collection of Bakunin's writings from the years of the First International. Unfortunately hard to find as it is printed in the US, but may be worth a search.

**K. J. Kenafick (ed). Marxism, Freedom and the State. Freedom Press, 1984. £1.95. -AK-**

Good vfm for a flimsy (but spined) volume with selections of Bakunin's writings and commentary, concentrating on the arguments between Marxists and anarchists in the First International.

**G. Woodcock (ed). The Anarchist Reader. Fontana. ISBN 0006 340113. -LI-**

While Woodcock's brand of anarchism may not be sparkling, this book is generally available in libraries and even second hand shops. You can always ignore his commentary, and turn to the extract of Bakunin 'Perils of the Marxist State'.

Notes: The further reading outlined is not designed to be an exhaustive bibliography or a prescriptive list. It is designed to provide some pointers for the reader who is interested in taking the topics raised in this Unit further. In addition to the above, it is always worth consulting your local library for general history texts which do cover the period, although they invariably understate the level of working class organisation and activity.

To assist Course Members, an indication is given alongside each reference as to how best to obtain it. The codes are as follows: -LI- try libraries (from local to university), -AK-available from AK Distribution (Course Member discount scheme applies if you order through SelfEd, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW), -BS- try good bookshops, -SE-ask SelfEd about loans or offprints).