

Marxism and its Tangents...

for anarchists

some quick and dirty thumbnails because
sometimes people are not really on our team

Marxism:

- linear (progress—ie thinking and systems go in one direction)
- determinist (everything is caused by another event or action so you are not free to choose what you do)
- class-based (we are determined by our economic background/place in the economy)
- internationalist (the important things are what connect us regardless of or beyond country, and implicitly, regardless of location)

Maoism

- peasants are the revolutionary agents, vs industrialized workers
- members of the most oppressed group are the most revolutionary (the most knowledgeable and the most dedicated to foundational change)
- Three Worlds Theory: categorizing countries based on their imperialist practices vs economics

Leninism:

The purpose of the Leninist vanguard party is to establish a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat. The vanguard party would lead the revolution and then transfer power of government to the working class, which change of ruling class—from bourgeoisie to proletariat—makes possible the full development of socialism. Lenin proposed that this was the only way that the proletariat could successfully achieve a revolution; unlike the economist campaign of trade-union struggle advocated by other socialist political parties; and later by the anarcho-syndicalists.

Trotskyism:

- absolute emphasis on the working class as the revolutionary agent (vs peasants, etc)

- internationalist (the connections between the working class are the most important ones)

Stalinism:

- rapid industrialization
- the theory of socialism in one country (vs “permanent revolution”)
- a totalitarian state
- collectivization of agriculture
- a cult of personality and
- subordination of the interests of foreign communist parties to those of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, presumably the leading vanguard party of communist revolution at the time

Stalinism promoted the escalation of class conflict, utilizing state violence to forcibly purge society of the bourgeoisie, whom Stalinist doctrine regarded as threats to the pursuit of the communist revolution. This policy resulted in substantial political violence and persecution of such people. "Enemies" included not only bourgeois people, but also working-class people with counter-revolutionary sympathies.

Explaining Maoism's Continuing Popularity Among Radicals
(excerpts)

Maoism in the US Max Elbaum

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Maoism's advocacy of a disciplined, secretive party also spoke to the frustrations many felt with the chaotic functioning of most New Left formations – as well as to the growing concerns they had about building organizations capable of resisting infiltration and repression. Maoism defended extra-legal tactics, armed self-defense and preparation for military struggle in a way that appealed to those who had directly experienced the massive state violence of the late '60s; this contrasted sharply with the far more cautious perspectives of Old Left groups. Finally, during its formative period Maoism did not appear to be an ideology distinct from or in competition with broader currents of revolutionary thought, especially the views of the Vietnamese and Cuban Communist Parties and the liberation movements in southern Africa and the Middle East. Thus U.S. Maoism took shape only partly as an orthodox expression of Chinese doctrine: other versions of Marxism-Leninism which gave major emphasis to the struggles of Third World peoples abroad and communities of color at home were also part of the mix.

Maoism Marches On: the revolutionary idea that still shapes the world

Julia Lovell

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Maoism is a set of contradictory ideas that has distinguished itself from Soviet guises of Marxism in several important ways. Giving centre stage to a non-western, anti-colonial agenda, Mao declared to radicals in developing countries that Russian-style communism should be adapted to local, national conditions. Diverging from Stalin, he told revolutionaries to take their struggle out of the cities and to fight guerrilla wars deep in the countryside. He preached the doctrine of voluntarism: that by sheer audacity of belief the Chinese – and any other people with the necessary strength of will – could transform their country. Revolutionary zeal, not weaponry, was the decisive factor. Although, like Lenin and Stalin, Mao was determined to build a militarised one-party state worshipful of its supreme leader, he also (especially in his last decade) championed an anarchic insubordination, telling the Chinese people that “it is right to rebel”. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), he deployed his own cult to mobilise millions of Chinese people – especially star-struck, indoctrinated youth – to smash party rivals whom he deemed counterrevolutionary.

Born in an era in which China was held in contempt by the international system, Mao, through the 1940s, assembled a practical and theoretical toolkit for turning a fractious, failing empire into a defiant global power. He created a language that intellectuals and peasants, men and women could understand; a disciplined army; a system of propaganda and thought control that has been described as “one of the most ambitious attempts at human manipulation in history”. He gathered around him a company of ruthless, unusually talented comrades, and his ideas elicited extraordinary levels of fervour. Millions entered into marriages of political convenience and abandoned their children to devote themselves to a utopian experiment. Many of these children in turn denounced, humiliated and – in extreme cases – killed their parents in the 1960s and 70s, in his name.

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While the Khmer Rouge committed genocide, western Europe and North America ran their own Maoist fevers. The noisy protest culture of the late 60s passionately identified with Mao’s message to his youthful Red Guards that it was “right to rebel”. Mao badges were pinned on student lapels, Mao quotations were daubed on the walls of lecture halls. Maoist-anarchists scrambled to the top of a church in West Berlin and bombarded passersby with hundreds of Little Red Books. A 1967 issue of *Lui* magazine (a French version of *Playboy*) included a special China supplement, titled *The Little Pink Book*, illustrated by Mao soundbites and snaps of young women dressed – if at all – in Mao jackets and playfully assuming faux-militant Cultural Revolution poses. One young woman, naked except for a rifle, leapt out of a vast white cake, to the Maoist dictum “revolution is not a dinner party”. At least one professional militant in

the Bronx read the Little Red Book to his marijuana plant to help it to grow.

Amid widespread disgust at US intervention in Vietnam, western radicals' fellowship with Mao's China – tireless in its rhetorical attacks on America – followed the logic of “my enemy's enemy is my friend”. After the quashing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet Union no longer represented a rebellious bulwark against capitalism. The People's Republic of China – bigger than Vietnam, more remote than Cuba, more extreme than them both – looked the best alternative. Sympathy with Mao's China merged with outrage over the mistreatment of American “internal colonies” – black, Latin and Asian American. Impressed by Mao's denunciations of US foreign policy and expressions of solidarity with black rights, the militant wing of the African American liberation movement channelled Mao's ideas to challenge the white American ruling establishment. The Black Panthers sold Little Red Books to generate funds to buy their first guns.

After the European protest movement of the late 60s petered out, Cultural Revolution-inspired radicalism bled into urban terrorism in West Germany – the Red Army Faction (AKA the Baader-Meinhof group) caused 34 deaths in the 70s alone – and in Italy, where the Red Brigades committed some 14,000 acts of violence, resulting in 75 deaths, between 1970 and 2003. Both the RAF and the Red Brigades larded their declarations with Mao quotations: “imperialism and all reactionaries [are] paper tigers”; “whoever is not afraid of being drawn and quartered, can dare to pull the emperor from his horse”.

Following Mao's death in 1976, and the PRC's own denunciation of the Cultural Revolution as “10 years of chaos”, western enthusiasm for Mao faded. But in the developing world – above all in India and Nepal – his ideas remained powerfully appealing. There, Mao's revolution represented a blueprint for political success apparently suited to poor, agrarian states that had suffered at the hands of colonialism. High-caste rebels seduced by China's technicolour propaganda dream of an egalitarian utopia led Maoist insurgencies years, even decades after the chairman's death. These leaders, paradoxically, have come from the educated classes of which Mao himself was so mistrustful. One – the privately educated brother of a Mumbai ice-cream entrepreneur – trained in London as a chartered accountant before declaring war on the Indian state.

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Political Naïveté
or what are we to do about Maoism
Aragorn!

<http://aragorn.anarchyplanet.org/political-naivete/>

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Maoism isn't a relevant political tendency or movement in America. It isn't leading guerrilla forces in the hills, it has no leaders-in-waiting just outside the border (unless you count Avakian which you should in no way do), but it isn't further from the mainstream of American political thought than Anarchism is (anarchist big tent populists to the contrary) and is arguably much closer (in an often-cited example, the mayor of Oakland, Jean Quan, is a former Maoist). More pointedly, Maoism and Anarchism have been cross-pollinating for decades. Our task here is to shine a light on that history and challenge what benefits anarchists have garnered from this little-discussed pollination.

A Defense of Anarchism

One may pause here to consider the goal of defending anarchism against Maoism (or any other ideology of the left). Why bother? Isn't anarchism exactly as irrelevant as these other 19th century ideas? Yes and no. If you are talking about the fights within the First International about what form the revolutionary party will take (secret or public), or the composition of the most advanced working class groups (craftsmen or factory), than yes, absolutely. Even if you are talking about the integrated partisans of the Spanish Civil War, then the term has declined into the merely historical. Of interest perhaps, primarily because of the optimism and ferocity of its partisans, but really a demonstration of a good liberal university education and not much else.

If, on the other hand, anarchism is the term used to describe an open-ended theory that will not, cannot, be set in stone until the day of days, because it isn't named after a man, because it is named after negation, because it is impossible, then no. In its hostile negative, anarchism is a well-suited expression of our time.

As anarchism is the theory that we are the ones who directly engage with life, not representatives of us (whether politicians, NGOs, or community leaders), not systems of control (statistical, bureaucratic, or functional), and not specialists in freedom (authors, etc), then we embrace it. We doubly embrace it if somehow this engagement with life also means the absolute destruction of the system-as-it-is but we know that this destruction—whether called revolution, evolution, or communization—is not guaranteed or even likely in our lifetime. This

means that our theory interfaces with the reality of politics and other people every day but without the burden of the correct revolutionary ideology (which has in no way been more successful than anarchism, just more bloody).

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A Little About Ideas

The reason that anarchists should study and reflect on Maoism, in particular, is because (in the words of MIM, an RCP split that dissolved a few years ago) “Maoism and real anarchism have the same long-run goals.” (Avakian has said similar things in his critiques of anarchism). MIM (and other explicit Maoists) believe that the only fundamental difference between their perspective and that of anarchists is that Maoists have a plan to implement this shared goal, so their revolutionary program is authentic (rather than anarchists’ expression of bourgeois ideology). Right ideas + leadership = revolutionary moral authority?

We live in a post-party era, where the traditional left—whether of unions or alphabet groups—has largely disappeared, and the terrain of anarchistic political discourse cannot be dismissed with the typical anarchist wave of the hand and a decry against “authoritarianism.” By and large, everyone (activists, Occupy, organizers) is willing to say they are anti-authoritarian. The rub is to describe exactly what that means.

The most common place where this discussion is happening couldn’t be older, or more historical. It surrounds the concept of the National Question and how one or another perspective has a solution to it. This concept has its origin in Stalin’s working definition of a nation: “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up, manifested in a common culture.” The Maoist revision includes an addendum that “internal colonies” of nations, exist within the belly of countries like the US (or in the rings of French cities). In either case the National Question is a way to frame the issue of how to organize the shock troops of the next social unrest and how to articulate the program of what the fight is about.

In a useful recent exchange about this between two Maoist groups (the Fire Next Time Committee and Signalfire), here is a summary from Signalfire:

To sum up our stance...it is sufficient to say one step forward, two steps back. In attempting to deal with the real problematic of the ‘people of color’ discourse and identity politics, it seeks to establish an analysis of race coupled with an analysis of class. In doing so,

rather than producing an adequate critique and substantive class analysis, the author simply gives us generalities which interrogated at a basic level are superficial and useless in satisfying the need for a real class analysis of the United States.

Rather than seeking truth from facts, it telescopes the particularity of experiences into universalities, and simply doesn't have an analysis of class that actually corresponds with the existing class structure. It has rather engaged in another sort of "identity politics" of a Brown/Yellow guilt type in relationship to Black oppression, centering it as a fulcrum for the articulation of white supremacist ideology and class structure.

Obviously the National Question still looms large for Maoists and this terminology should be familiar to anyone who is active in big city radical politics. Understanding these two paragraphs is sufficient to function well in the Bay Area political scene.

Imperialism, Colonialism, and Gentrification are **not** vectors. They don't trace a line from some historical moment (for example, of primitive purity) on through our current horrorshow into a dystopia/utopia. Descriptors are often confused for causes and this is nowhere more clear than from political perspectives that Have Answers, answers that can be argued for, that are believed to be only capable of winning if others are convinced, and finally, that create a logical whole, something coherent (as if this world is coherent).

While many anarchists are convinced by this logical procedural thinking, anyone who is opposed to authoritarianism should break with this trajectory when it comes to a history of Imperialism or Colonialism (or even gentrification) that doesn't see the state as a necessary part of the genealogy. A monopoly on violence is entirely necessary to invade, control, and genocide a people. It is only to the extent to which capitalism has taken on this monopoly (if it has) that it has taken center stage as the villain for communists and anti-authoritarians.

For anarchists these questions are much simpler. As soon as monopolistic impulses are discovered the hackles of most anarchists are raised. This means that party discipline or even toeing an ideological line tends to be impossible in most anarchist circles. If you accept the Leninist/Blanquist (vanguard/small cadre) model of revolution then anarchists make poor cadre (but so does everyone else!).

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The Wisdom of Fools

As long as anarchists do not inform ourselves about the myriad of

forces that seek to intentionally confuse their project for an anarchist one, we will continue to be fooled by them. More problematically, and over a long enough timeline, this confusion becomes reality. “Anti-authoritarian” becomes a soft way to obscure that you are a Maoist whose “revolutionary program” is what makes you a true anti-authoritarian. “Anti-Imperialist” becomes a way to describe hostility to American foreign policy and not an adherent of the three worlds theory of Maoism. “Decolonization” becomes code for an urban aspiration for an impossible culture instead of a problematic term relating to everything from native resistance to resource extraction, the dismantling of older Empires, or a project of the United Nations.

Perhaps it is too late, at least in the US, at least for my lifetime. We are a culture that has abandoned not just reading but critical thinking on the whole. Watching language morph into its opposite used to be something associated with the totalitarianism of the USSR or Newspeak of Orwell’s fictional universe. Debord’s spectacle updated this dialectical perversion by demonstrating how capitalism has butressed the monopoly of violence that used to be a prerequisite for this violence to language. Our meme-tastic, utterly superficial engagement with even political questions like how to live, how to do it together, and who am I in relationship to others, seems to show that pointing to Maoists as a political problem is about as useful as talking about aliens and pyramid power. Anarchy as conflict with the existing order, both state and capital and also the its conceptual framework, is an infinite endeavor.

Hesitations aside I know that someone out there will hear me. They will recognize a political pedigree in the rhetoric of some local blowhard and will be tempted to stand alone in a room, point a finger, and shout *Jaccuse!* I would warn you against this line of thinking. If the post-left has anything to teach us it is that being right, and informing others of it, isn’t nearly enough. It may be preferable to maintain the affect of the happy fool, the politically naïve, while tilling the soil for the seeds to feed those who will engage (as anarchists) with politicians. Decrying their badness polarizes the point too early in the relationship. Timing means recognizing that the first moment one understands a situation isn’t the moment to act. Anarchy means attack and attack means patience.