

HAL DRAPER: FROM "THE TWO SOULS OF SOCIALISM"

One of the most thoroughgoing authoritarians in the history of radicalism is none other than the "Father of Anarchism," Proudhon, whose name is periodically revived as a great "libertarian" model, because of his industrious repetition of the word liberty and his invocations to "revolution from below."

Some may be willing to pass over his Hitlerite form of anti-Semitism ("The Jew is the enemy of humankind. It is necessary to send this race back to Asia, or exterminate it ..."). Or his principled racism in general (he thought it was right for the South to keep American Negroes in slavery, since they were the lowest of inferior races). Or his glorification of war for its own sake (in the exact manner of Mussolini). Or his view that women had no rights ("I deny her every political right and every initiative. For woman liberty and well-being lie solely in marriage, in motherhood, in domestic duties ...") - that is, the "Kinder-Kirche-Küche" of the Nazis.

But it is not possible to gloss over his violent opposition not only to trade-unionism and the right to strike (even supporting police strikebreaking), but to any and every idea of the right to vote, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, and the very idea of constitutions. ("All this democracy disgusts me ... What would I not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists!") His notes for his ideal society notably include suppression of all other groups, any public meeting by more than 20, any free press, and any elections; in the same notes he looks forward to "a general inquisition" and the condemnation of "several million people" to forced labor - "once the Revolution is made."

Behind all this was a fierce contempt for the masses of people - the necessary foundation of Socialism-from-Above, as its opposite was the groundwork of Marxism. The masses are corrupt and hopeless ("I worship humanity, but I spit on men!") They are "only savages ... whom it is our duty to civilize, and without making them our sovereign," he wrote to a friend whom he scornfully chided with: "You still believe in the people." Progress can come only from mastery by an elite who take care to give the people no sovereignty.

At one time or another he looked to some ruling despot as the one-man dictator who would bring the Revolution: Louis Bonaparte (he wrote a whole book in 1852 extolling the Emperor as the bearer of the Revolution); Prince Jerome Bonaparte; finally Czar Alexander II ("Do not forget that the despotism of the czar is necessary to civilization").

There was a candidate for the dictator's job closer to home, of course: himself. He elaborated a detailed scheme for a "mutualist" business, cooperative in form, which would spread to take over all business and then the state. In his notes Proudhon put himself down as the Manager in Chief, naturally not subject to the democratic control he so despised. He took care of details in advance: "Draw up a secret program, for all the managers: irrevocable elimination of royalty, democracy, proprietors, religion [and so on]." - "The Managers are the natural representatives of the country. Ministers are only superior Managers or General Directors: as I will be one day ... When we are masters, Religion will be what we want it to be; ditto Education, philosophy, justice, administration and government."

The reader, who may be full of the usual illusions about anarchist "libertarianism," may ask: Was he then insincere about his great love for liberty?

Not at all: it is only necessary to understand what anarchist "liberty" means. Proudhon wrote: "The principle of liberty is that of the Abbey of Theleme [in Rabelais]: do what you want!" and the principle meant: "any man who cannot do what he wants and anything he wants has the right to revolt, even alone, against the government, even if the government were everybody else. - the only man who can enjoy this liberty is a despot; this is the sense of the brilliant insight by Dostoyevsky's Shigalev: 'Starting from unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism!'"

The story is similar with the second "Father of Anarchism," Bakunin, whose schemes for dictatorship and suppression of democratic control are better known than Proudhon's.

The basic reason is the same: Anarchism is not concerned with the creation of democratic control from below, but only with the destruction of "authority" over the individual, including the authority of the most extremely democratic regulation of society that it is possible to imagine. This has been made clear by authoritative anarchist expositors time and again; for example, by George Woodcock: "even were democracy possible, the anarchist would still not support it ... Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics..." Anarchism is on principle fiercely anti-democratic, since an ideally democratic authority is still authority. But since, rejecting democracy, it has no other way of resolving the inevitable disagreements and differences among the inhabitants of Theleme, its unlimited freedom for each uncontrolled individual is indistinguishable from unlimited despotism by such an individual, both in theory and practice.

The great problem of our age is the achievement of democratic control from below over the vast powers of modern social authority. Anarchism, which is freest of all with verbiage about something-from-below, rejects this goal. It is the other side of the coin of bureaucratic despotism, with all its values turned inside-out, not the cure or the alternative.