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Why Anti-Capitalism?
Progressive Reformism and the Anarchist Critique of Capitalism
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the root of the problem finds itself to the essential features of capitalism itself. These problems therefore cannot be solved by reform, but must be replaced by a new economic system.

Human emancipation must be conquered by the workers, ending all class privileges and monopolies and basing a new system upon the equality of rights and duties. As capitalism has swept over the entire globe, so too must the workers of the world unite to fight this menace eroding away the basis of society and learn to live in harmony with the earth. Essential to this process is replacing the monopolized control over the means of production with collective ownership, replacing this system of destructive competition found in market societies with one of self-management and solidarity.

> *[T]he emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves, that the struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule.* — General Rules of the first International Workingmen's Association

The Reformist Challenge to Anarchism

I have written several critiques of propertarianism, the ideologies which commonly disguises itself as a kind of libertarianism. As it defensed the most extreme and grotesque forms of capitalism, it frequently needs to defend itself using logical fallacies, taking absurd and self-contradictory stances which, if really examined, reveal its true authoritarian nature. So far I have examined the circularity of the non-aggression "principle," Ayn Rand's ridiculous notions of life and value, and Murray Rothbard's support for a neo-feudal dictatorship.

But these examples are all of people who take their support for capitalism to the most absurd extreme. While my criticisms might highlight problematic tendencies within capitalism and the kind of ideologies it produces, they at best only hint towards a critique of capitalism itself. One could easily read these articles as an argument for why capitalism needs to be *regulated* rather than *abolished*. We do not need to be full-blown socialists to say "Hey, this Ayn Rand lady is kinda weird!"

Many people recognize that there are serious issued associated with capitalism like wealth inequality, low wages, unsafe workplaces, environmental destruction and global warming, corruption, war, colonialism, mass incarceration, and the many ways we can see intersections between capitalism and bigotry, racism, patriarchy, queerphobia, etc.

But do not throw the baby out with the bath water!

Just because all of these problems exist doesn't mean we need to get rid of capitalism all together. For all its faults, capitalism is resilient, and if we go on talking about revolutions and the violence that comes with it we risk ending up with something even worse. To use a quote frequently misattributed to Winston Churchill, "Capitalism is the worst economic system, except for all the others." Instead of calling for ending capitalism, why can call for less extreme measures that help to address these issues like putting taxes on the rich, a higher minimum wage, workplace safety regulations, environmental regulations, greater transparency, greater international diplomacy, justice reform, and so on.[1] Other issues like racism, sexism, and homophobia predate the existence of capitalism. Even if they are associated with capitalism today, it's not clear that any other economic mode of production would fix these issues, and therefore does not seem to move us past the call for mere reforms to capitalism.

There is some truth to these points. For the moment, we may grant that many reforms and regulations could significantly reduce, if not solve, issues that arise within capitalism. We may ignore for the moment the failures to practically achieves these reforms at a sufficient level, as seen in the failure to address climate change despite decades of effort. Even if these problems could be solved, anarchists still have a good reason for opposing capitalism. Anarchists do not merely oppose capitalism because it is associated with these other evils, but because it is regarded as an evil itself. No matter how reformed, capitalism is incompatible with our values of liberty, equality, and solidarity. While reforms may reduce some of

[1] One of the things that helps to distinguish propertarianism from a more general liberalism is its refusal to recognize these as issues of capitalism, or blame them on us having insufficient capitalism or a corrupted "crony"-capitalism. They therefore oppose even the most modest versions of these reforms, holding bourgeois property as their ultimate and sole foundation.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has not been to debunk every single possible defense of capitalism that has been or might be raised. Rather, it has been to show the fundamental points of the anarchist critique of capitalism, especially in the face of challenges that might be presented from someone of a more progressive and reformist mindset.

From this, we've seen that the basic issue with capitalism, which it shares with all systems of exploitation, is the monopolization of the means of production in the hands of the capitalists and landlords. Through this, the capitalists are able to force the workers to not only produce their own means of subsistence, but to do additional labor on top of that and create profit. This establishes a system where some, simply through their ownership, can live without working by making others work, part of the time, for free.

Despite superficial appearances of being voluntary, existing as a contractual relationship between the capitalist and the wage-laborer, capitalism is fundamentally involuntary because these contracts only exist within the context of means of production that have already been brought under the control of the capitalists and landlords. While anarchists challenge the legitimacy of any such claim, this further tends to create a situation where the worker can only realistically survive by selling their labor-power to the capitalists. A choice of "work or die" has been imposed upon them. This further develops an authoritarian relationship between the worker and their boss, creating a hierarchy where a few give commands and everyone else must obey. This authoritarianism extends to the state itself as a structure which, although it sometimes places certain limits on the actions of capital, is not something which workers can ultimately rely on for their own emancipation.

As these are foundational issues with capitalism, they cannot be solved by any system of reform. Any attempt to get to

> for surplus-labour which every paragraph legalised, the English Factory Acts are the negative expression of the same greed. These acts curb the passion of capital for a limitless draining of labour-power, by forcibly limiting the working-day by state regulations, made by a state that is ruled by capitalist-and landlord. Apart from the working-class movement that daily grew more threatening, the limiting of factory labour was dictated by the same necessity which spread guano over the English fields. The same blind eagerness for plunder that in the one case exhausted the soil, had, in the other, torn up by the roots the living force of the nation. Periodical epidemics speak on this point as clearly as the diminishing military standard in Germany and France. (Marx, *Capital* Vol 1, Ch. 10)

By emphasizing the military readiness of Germany and France, we also see how this comes into conflict with the interests of the state in ways we have already covered.

While the state may act to limit this boundless greed of capitalism, it is also clear that it is far from a perfect or even reliable defender of society. The dangers of global warming and the spread of climate change misinformation and denial by oil and gas companies highlight how, even with issues that do threaten the longevity of capital and the state, this may not be enough to overcome the interests of certain individual capitalists. Just like we saw with anti-vaccine conspiracies, these destructive tendencies might win out. It is therefore all the more important that workers build their own organizations and strength to combat the capital and the state, demanding their own emancipation, and creating a world that will ultimately be better even for the former capitalists themselves.

the harms that come with capitalism, they cannot solve all of them without abolishing capitalism itself.

The anarchist Alexander Berkman expressed this position here:

> The reformer wants to 'reform and improve.' He is not sure what it is that he really wants to change: sometimes he says that 'people are bad,' and it is them that he wants to 'reform'; at other times he means to 'improve' conditions. He does not believe in abolishing an evil altogether. Doing away with something that is rotten is 'too radical' for him. 'For Heaven's sake,' he cautions you, 'don't be too hasty.' He wants to change things gradually, little by little.
>
> If you should carry out his ideas in your personal life, you would not have a rotten tooth that aches pulled out all at once. You would have it pulled out a little to-day, some more next week for several months or years, and by then you would be ready to pull it out altogether, so it should not hurt so much. That is the logic of the reformer. Don't be 'too hasty,' don't pull a bad tooth out all at once.
>
> [...]
>
> The great evil is not that politicians are corrupt and the administration of law unjust. If that were the only trouble then we might try, like the reformer, to 'purify' politics and to work for a more 'just administration'. But it is not that which is the real trouble. The trouble is not with impure politics, but that the whole game of politics is rotten. The trouble is not with defects in the administration of the law, but that law itself is an instrument to subject and oppress the people.

> The whole system of law and government is a machine to keep the workers enslaved and to rob them of their toil. Every social 'reform' whose realization depends on law and government is already *thereby* doomed to failure. (Alexander Berkman, *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*)

To understand the anarchist rejection of capitalism, we must start by examining what anarchists believe the essence of capitalism to be. Only once we understand these fundamentals can we also see what abolishing capitalism would require.

By highlighting the nature of this evil, as I hope to do in this paper, we also may see a glimpse at what a better system would look like without these problems, although I do not intend on fully elaborating such a system here. The various tendencies of socialism share many points of this critique of capitalism, but give different answers for what an alternative would look like. Even if we narrow the focus down from all socialists to just anarchists, we'd get a variety of different answers from different anarchist tendencies. Fully considering these tendencies lies beyond the scope of this paper, and many of the answers for what an alternative will look like is something workers must solve practically in the process of fighting for their own emancipation, experimenting with different forms of organizing to learn what works best.

I have been inspired to write this paper while I was sharing Zoe Baker's wonderful book *Means and Ends: The Revolutionary Practice of Anarchism in Europe and the United States* (2023) with a friend of mine who is coming from a much more liberal / social-democratic background. While they were sympathetic to much of the analysis and values that Baker highlights in the early anarchists, this might have been their first real encounter with more serious and openly anti-capitalist literature. They found Baker's summary of the anarchist critique of capitalism

> stimuli. Important areas of conflict involved government economic controls, limits on trade, and the high cost of autarky—the economic self-sufficiency by which the Nazis hoped to overcome the shortages that had lost Germany World War I. Autarky required costly substitutes—Ersatz—for such previously imported products as oil and rubber.[17]

Finally, the state may act against the interests of certain individual capitalists because it exists to represent the interests of the total social capital. Tying back into our initial point in this section, both capital and the state have a vested interest in making sure society continues to exist, since they rely on the exploitation of the workers. However, this is only true of the working class as a whole and not of each individual worker. A capitalist may happily undermine certain costly safety standards in production if they can, which would lead to the injury and death of their workers, so long as there are other unemployed workers out there ready to replace them.

We see an example of this analyzed in Marx's *Capital*. When capitalism was first developing, the state played a crucial role in lengthening the working-day, forcing people to work longer and longer hours. However, once capitalism had matured, the role of the state flipped, now trying to *limit* the number of hours worked and establish certain safety and health standards through things like the English Factory Acts. This was not merely because of the growing outrage and strength of the working classes, but from the practical needs of capital itself. Marx put it like this:

> If the Règlement organique of the Danubian provinces was a positive expression of the greed

[17] Robert Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 145–146

to his actions and the anti-vaccine more broadly over the last few years, the US currently has nearly 900 cases of measles, a disease which was declared eliminated from the US in 2000 thanks to widespread use of the highly effective measles vaccine. A sick and dying workforce undermines the direct interests of capital, but the strength of this movement has moved the state to behave this way.

This ties into the second explanation for how and why the state may act against the interests of capital: in defense of its own interests. While the state functions to reproduce the power of the economic ruling classes, it *also* reproduces its own power as a political ruling class. Anarchists do not just see class as an issue of relations to the means of production, but also, as Baker indicates, "a person's relationship to the means of institutionalized coercion. Those who directly controlled state power, such as politicians, monarchs, heads of the police, etc., were taken by anarchists to constitute a distinct political ruling class with interests of their own."[16]

Because the state has its own distinct interests, it may come into genuine conflict with the capitalists. For example, we mentioned earlier how the state may be driven into wars and conflicts for the sake of helping capital gain access to new markets and take control over certain resources. However, the state may also be drawn into wars which go against the interests of capitalists, or sustain wars past the point capitalists see it in their interests. This is perhaps most obvious when the more nationalist interests of the state are put in contrast to the internationalist interests of capitalists seeking the best markets. To use fascists as an example again, the historian Robert Paxton describes in *The Anatomy of Fascism* how the fascist state and capitalists had both converging and conflicting interests:

> Areas of agreement included disciplining workers, lucrative armaments contracts, and job-creation

[16] *Means and Ends*, p. 76–77

quite interesting, but far too brief. As I believe Baker did a wonderful job condensing the main points of the anarchist critique in her paper, much of this paper can be understood as an elaboration on the groundwork she laid. I also intend on quoting many other anarchists, like Berkman above, to highlight these arguments in their own words and help readers to become familiarized with anarchist history.

The Anarchist Understanding and Critique of Capitalism

Capitalism is so pervasive in modern society that recognizing it as one distinct system among many can be difficult. Many people, including workers, are liable to look at certain features unique to modern society and assume they are necessary features of *all* societies. This seriously hinders any attempt at imagining a better system, as issues caused by capitalism instead appear as unchangeable features of human nature.

We therefore begin with an explanation of what capitalism is, identifying its defining features. Once we have done this, we can also recognize the negative consequences of these features, some of which might be remedied by certain reforms, while others require abolishing capitalism itself.

Zoe Baker summarizes the essential features of capitalism like so:

> Anarchists viewed capitalism as a social system constituted by: (a) private ownership of land, raw materials, and the means of production; (b) wage labor; and (c) production of commodities for profit within a competitive market. Under capitalism, society is divided into two main economic classes: a minority of capitalists and landowners who privately own land, raw materials, and the means

> of production; and a majority of workers who do not own private property and who sell their labor to capitalists and landowners. The labor of workers produces goods and services that are sold by capitalists and landowners on the market in order to generate profit and thereby expand their wealth. Workers, in comparison, receive only a wage, which they then use to buy the necessities of life—food, shelter, and clothing—and thereby reproduce themselves.[2] (Zoe Baker, *Means and Ends*)

As it is defined here, capitalism has three main features:

1. Private ownership of the land, raw materials, and the means of production
2. Wage Labor
3. Commodity production for profit in a competitive market

These points are intrinsically connected. Because the means of production are owned privately, belonging to "a minority of capitalists and landowners," the laborers who make up the majority of the population have been separated from their means of labor. The workers are only able to access the means of production with the special permission of the owning classes, which they will only extend to the worker when they believe it is in their interest to do so. Generally, they will only hold this view not because they take any particular interest in what the workers are producing, but because they expect the worker's product can be sold on the market at a profit.

[2] Berkman, *Anarchism*, 7–8; Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 58–60, 100–101.

> soon as any signs of weakness were observable in the workers' organisations, so governments also are always inclined to restrict or to abrogate completely rights and freedoms that have been achieved if they imagine that the people will put up no resistance. Even in these countries where such things as freedom of the press, right of assembly, right of combination and the like have long existed, governments are constantly trying to restrict these rights or to reinterpret them by juridical hair-splitting. Political rights do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habit of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will meet with the violent resistance of the populace. Where this is not the case, there is no help in any parliamentary Opposition or any Platonic appeals to the constitution. One compels respect from others when he knows how to defend his dignity as a human being. This is not only true in private life, it has always been the same in political life as well. (Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice*)

It is, of course, not just labor organizations which attempt to influence state policy. To give an example from the opposite end of the political spectrum, fascists often develop their own nonsensical demands which, if and when they are put into practice, are not only damaging to the workers, but also to the capitalists and even themselves. For example, Robert F. Kennedy has recently been made the US Secretary of Health and Human Services and is an extreme anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist. His appointment was due, in large part, to the extreme anti-vaccine movement that developed in the United States and became so prominent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks

Firstly, because class conflict is an inherent feature of capitalism, the working class can achieve certain victories and enforce them.

Sometimes this is achieved by electing certain politicians into office who are more sympathetic to the workers' cause, although we have noted above that anarchists believe there are fatal flaws in this approach to the goal of total emancipation if workers build their power base within an organization that is structurally opposed to them.

Other times, as anarchists instead advocate, these demands are imposed on the state by the workers' organization from the outside. Just like workers in a labor union might get a capitalist to pay higher wages as a negotiated end to a strike, so too can workers demand that the state establish certain reforms. For example, Spain became the first country in the world to establish the 8-hour workday legislation in the wake of a 44-day general strike organized by the anarcho-syndicalist labor union the CNT.

Anarchists believe it is crucial that the enforcement of the workers' rights and freedom be upheld by the workers themselves. This means using direct action in their own organizations rather than relying on politicians claiming to act as their representatives who, in truth, likely couldn't enforce them anyway without the active support and assistance of these outside organizations.

As the anarchist Rudolf Rocker put it:

> [T]he political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people. Political rights do not originate in parliaments; they are, rather, forced on parliaments from without. And even their enactment into law has for a long time been no guarantee of their security. Just as the employers always try to nullify every concession they had made to labour as soon as opportunity offered, as

It is because of the private ownership of the means of production that the workers must labor under conditions set by the capitalists and landlords, the most important of which is the need to produce a profit for them. The worker, through their labor, utilizes the land, raw materials, and means of production to create something which can be sold on the market at a higher price. This price should be high enough that it not only covers the cost of wages the employing classes needed to pay the worker, but leaves them with a surplus on top of that, i.e. profit. If the employing classes do not expect their wage-laborers to do this, and they cannot reorganize things into something profitable for themselves, they would instead shut down production entirely and prevent the workers from accessing the means of production at all.

These elements not only connect, but also presuppose one another. Because of the dominance of commodity production, all of the workers' products can be found on the market for sale. The workers are only able to survive on being paid money-wages because all the necessities of life can be purchased on the market in exchange for money. The same is true for the capitalists and landlords, who can not only use they money they get from the sale of the commodity-product to purchase necessities and luxuries for themselves, but also find for sale on the market all the elements of production needed, including the worker's labor-power, to start this process all over again. They can even reinvest part of the profits they received to expand production so they can receive an even greater amount of profits in the future.

Money and wage-labor have existed for thousands of years, but they have only achieved their dominant position relatively recently. Commodity production was not the dominant form of labor in previous societies. In a society of subsistence farmers, for example, workers would generally use the product of their labor themselves rather than producing for the market. They would grow their own food, make their own clothes, build

their own homes, etc. They may sell anything they had left over on the market or purchase certain specialty items they needed, they did not generally engage in commodity production.[3] The capitalism of today only exists because it evolved out of what came before.

Capitalism is not an essential part of human nature. It is not "eternal." But it has also been able to sustain itself over an extended period of time. It therefore must have some way of reproducing itself, maintaining the conditions that drive people to organize this way. Once the production process is complete, the capitalists, landlords, and workers all find themselves back in the original circumstances that drove them together. The capitalists and landlords remain in control of the means of production, while the workers find themselves separated from the means of production and, to survive, must sell their labor-power back to the employing classes. Because they are in a greater point of leverage, the owning classes are also able to maximize their profits and guarantee that the great mass of workers have no choice but to sell their labor-power over and over again by keeping wages at a sufficiently low level.

It is also worth mentioning that, when we describe dynamics like this, we are doing so in the context of a *competitive*

[3] Karl Marx contrasts commodity production to other kinds of production in *Capital* Volume 1 Chapter 1 like this: "A thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity. Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour, creates, indeed, use values, but not commodities. In order to produce the latter, he must not only produce use values, but use values for others, social use values. (And not only for others, without more. The mediaeval peasant produced quit-rent-corn for his feudal lord and tithe-corn for his parson. But neither the quit-rent-corn nor the tithe-corn became commodities by reason of the fact that they had been produced for others. To become a commodity a product must be transferred to another, whom it will serve as a use value, by means of an exchange.)" The parentheses were added by Friedrich Engels "because its omission has often given rise to the misunderstanding that every product that is consumed by someone other than its producer is considered in Marx a commodity."

> would not be possible; it organises and manages a number of public services, such as the post, roads, cleansing and refuse disposal, land improvement and conservation, etc.; it promotes orphanages and hospitals, and often it condescends to pose as the protector and benefactor of the poor and the weak. But it is enough to understand how and why it carries out these functions to find the practical evidence that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender. (Malatesta, Anarchy)

We can understand to some extent then why capitalists and the state may see it in their interests to do things which promote the general well being of the workers. The workers do not need the capitalists, but the capitalists need the workers. They cannot, without inviting their own destruction, wish for the destruction of the working classes. This is an interesting qualification that can be made to the claim of the Preamble of the IWW that "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." Just as a parasite must leave its host alive, the employing class needs to leave the workers alive if it is to continue exploiting them, and therefore has a paradoxical interest in maintaining their health even as it bleeds them.

Still, the state does more than just this, and sometimes will even act against the interests of the capitalists. The reformist may understandably wonder why this is. Why does the state take on these additional roles? Even more strangely, why does the state sometimes act against the interests of the capitalists? Why impose minimum wage laws or provide healthcare?

Anarchists believe this is achieved in a few ways.

militarist, even if it were to call itself republican." Terminology only really became more standardized over time.

Legal Regulation of Capitalism

Because anarchists have both these organizational and functional elements to their definition of the state, we can also understand why certain tasks done by the state are seen as so fundamental, like enforcing the private property rights of capitalists, while other tasks that truly are done by the state, like building roads or delivering mail, are seen as merely accidental.

As Malatesta put it in his essay Anarchy:

> The basic function of government everywhere in all times, whatever title it adopts and whatever its origin and organisation may be, is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters: and its principal, characteristic and indispensable, instruments are the police agent and the tax-collector, the soldier and the gaoler — to whom must be invariably added the trader in lies, be he priest or schoolmaster, remunerated or protected by the government to enslave minds and make them docilely accept the yoke.
>
> It is true that to these basic functions, to these essential organs of government, other functions, other organs have been added in the course of history. […] In fact government takes the trouble to protect, more or less, the lives of citizens against direct and violent attack; it recognises and legalises a number of basic rights and duties as well as usages and customs without which social life

market, and are therefore speaking in generalities and averages rather than each individual case. Certain capitalists and landlords may see their empires collapse and fall to the level of wage-laborers themselves, while some wage-laborers may find themselves in an opportune position to escape their poverty and become capitalists themselves. Some kinds of specialized or skilled labor that are high in demand and short in supply may be better paid than other forms of labor. But if capitalism maintains itself over time, and history shows that it has, then the owning classes need a large section of the population who are driven to sell their labor-power for a wage. Capitalism needs to guarantee that this population is found. Instead of hoping to find them accidentally, the system itself needs to create this population.

We are also dealing with a simplified description of how this process is going on. The surplus produced by the wage-laborers here is split up in several ways. It not only exists as profit, but as rent, interest on loans, taxes, and so on. Thanks to competition between the capitalists themselves, there is also a tendency for the rate of profit to equalize across industries, which also impacts how the surplus produced in any one industry is distributed across all industries.

But these complications don't affect the underlying point being made. The capitalists and landlords are leveraging their control over the means of production to require the workers to do surplus-labor to support and enrich their employers. In a word, the workers are *exploited*. This is the point made by anarchists, as well as by socialists in general.

We can see this expressed by several historical anarchists.

Mikhail Bakunin says this in his essay "The Capitalist System":

> What is property, what is capital in their present form? For the capitalist and the property owner they mean the power and the right, guaranteed by

> the State, to live without working. And since neither property nor capital produces anything when not fertilized by labor — that means the power and the right to live by exploiting the work of someone else, the right to exploit the work of those who possess neither property nor capital and who thus are forced to sell their productive power to the lucky owners of both. Note that I have left out of account altogether the following question: In what way did property and capital ever fall into the hands of their present owners? This is a question which, when envisaged from the points of view of history, logic, and justice, cannot be answered in any other way but one which would serve as an indictment against the present owners. I shall therefore confine myself here to the statement that property owners and capitalists, inasmuch as they live not by their own productive labor but by getting land rent, house rent, interest upon their capital, or by speculation on land, buildings, and capital, or by the commercial and industrial exploitation of the manual labor of the proletariat, all live at the expense of the proletariat. (Speculation and exploitation no doubt also constitute a sort of labor, but altogether non-productive labor.)

Peter Kropotkin similarly says this in *The Conquest of Bread* (1892):

> We, in civilized societies, are rich. Why then are the many poor? Why this painful drudgery for the masses? Why, even to the best paid workman, this uncertainty for the morrow, in the midst of all the wealth inherited from the past, and in spite of the powerful means of production, which could

prescribe for doing this, that is by seizing state power, retains this organizational form. Whether this is done through electing a "Labor Party" into office or through a coup, Marxists that retain this hierarchical historical form will, independently of their intentions, preserve or recreate a new kind of class system that exploits the majority of the working class.[14]

Anarchists wish to form their own organized fighting force on behalf of the oppressed, but they also believe this organization must be structured in a certain way or else the project will be doomed from the start. Likewise, in the alternatives they advocate and believe avoid these dangers, they do not call these organizations a "state" or "government," both because they serve a very different function and are organized along very different principles, even if there is a superficial similarity in the use of violence.

It is interesting to note that anarchists did not begin by defining the state this way. The people we now generally identify as the first anarchists would also sometimes advocate for what they called "government" or "the state" while trying to distinguish it from modern states and government in a similar way to the Marxists. Proudhon described anarchy as a form of government in *What is Property.*[15] Likewise, one of Bakunin's early calls for anarchy is found in his 1867 *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,* when he calls for a "United States of Europe" to be formed on anarchist principles, while rejecting the "centralized state, being of necessity bureaucratic and

[14] Zoe Baker covers this in detail in chapter 5 of *Means and Ends*, and actually also covered this in a shorter similarly titled essay years earlier called "Means and Ends: The Anarchist Critique of Seizing State Power".

[15] "*Anarchy*, — the absence of a master, of a sovereign, — such is the form of government to which we are every day approximating, and which our accustomed habit of taking man for our rule, and his will for law, leads us to regard as the height of disorder and the expression of chaos." (Proudhon, *What is Property*)

> define it in terms of both its functions and its particular organizational forms and characteristics. The primary function of the state is to reproduce the power of the economic ruling classes through violence.
>
> […]
>
> The state can nonetheless not be defined solely in terms of its essential function. The state as a really existing institution is also characterized by a specific organizational form. Actual states are institutions that (i) perform the function of reproducing the power of the economic ruling classes; (ii) are hierarchically and centrally organized; (iii) are wielded by a minority political ruling class who sit at the top of the state hierarchy and possess the authority to make laws and issue commands at a societal level that others must obey due to the threat or exercise of institutionalized force.[13]

Why do anarchists add this additional organizational component to their definition of the state? I believe it is because anarchists view the function of the state as extending as a direct consequence of its organizational form. It is *because* the state is "hierarchically and centrally organized" so that a "minority political ruling class" with the power to "issue commands at a society level" backed by the "threat or exercise of institutionalized force" that it also needs to reproduce the power of the economic ruling classes.

This ties into other anarchist concerns that the Marxist approach. While many Marxists may very genuinely wish to oppose capitalism and class rule in all forms, the method they

[13] Michael Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism*, ed. G.P. Maximoff (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 210–11; *Bakunin on Anarchism*, 317–20; Makhno, *Struggle*, 56.

> ensure comfort to all in return for a few hours of daily toil?
>
> The Socialists have said it and repeated it unwearyingly. Daily they reiterate it, demonstrating it by arguments taken from all the sciences. It is because all that is necessary for production — the land, the mines, the highways, machinery, food, shelter, education, knowledge — all have been seized by the few in the course of that long story of robbery, enforced migration and wars, of ignorance and oppression, which has been the life of the human race before it had learned to subdue the forces of Nature. It is because, taking advantage of alleged rights acquired in the past, these few appropriate to-day two-thirds of the products of human labour, and then squander them in the most stupid and shameful way. It is because, having reduced the masses to a point at which they have not the means of subsistence for a month, or even for a week in advance, the few only allow the many to work on condition of themselves receiving the lion's share. It is because these few prevent the remainder of men from producing the things they need, and force them to produce, not the necessaries of life for all, but whatever offers the greatest profits to the monopolists. In this is the substance of all Socialism.

Alexander Berkman put it like this:

> In the capitalist system the whole working class sells its labor power to the employing class. The workers build factories, make machinery and tools, and produce goods. The employers keep the fac-

tories, the machinery, tools and goods for themselves *as their profit.* The workers get only wages.

This arrangement is called the *wage system.*

Learned men have figured out that the worker receives as his wage only about *one-tenth* of what he produces. The other *nine-tenths* are divided among the landlord, the manufacturer, the railroad company, the wholesaler, the jobber, and other middlemen.

It means this:

Though the workers, as a class, have built the factories, a slice of their daily labor is taken from them for the privilege of *using* those factories. That's the landlord's profit.

Though the workers have made the tools and the machinery, another slice of their daily labor is taken from them for the privilege of *using* those tools and machinery. That's the manufacturer's profit.

Though the workers built the railroads and are running them, another slice of their daily labor is taken from them for the transportation of the goods they make. That's the railroad's profit.

And so on, including the banker who lends the manufacturer other people's money, the wholesaler, the jobber, and other middlemen, all of whom get their slice of the worker's toil.

What is left then — one-tenth of the real worth of the worker's labor — is *his* share, his wage.

Can you guess now why the wise Proudhon said that *the possessions of the rich are stolen property?* Stolen from the producer, the worker. (Alexander

> way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.
>
> Thus construed, the "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everybody, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.

If this were the only distinction, the anarchist definition of the state would be the same as the Marxist one, but adding to this idea of an organized fighting force on behalf of some class the qualification that it is used "for the purpose of promoting exploitation." This is an important enough distinction that the Marxists themselves resorted to calling the worker's state a pseudo-state.

However, anarchists also emphasize one other important qualification to their idea of the state. Anarchists not only look at the state in terms of its primary economic function, but also its own peculiar organizational form.

Zoe Baker represents the anarchist view and definition of the state in *Means and Ends* like so:

> Through an analysis of the modern state (henceforth referred to as the state) as an actually-existing social structure, anarchists came to

> minority. Naturally, to be successful, such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the utmost ferocity and savagery in the matter of suppressing, it calls for seas of blood, through which mankind is actually wading its way in slavery, serfdom and wage labor.
>
> Furthermore, during the transition from capitalism to communism suppression is still necessary, but it is now the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the "state", is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state. It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage-laborers, and it will cost mankind far less. (Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch. 5)

For all the reasons Engels and Lenin think this state is not really a state "in the proper sense of the word," anarchists did not call it a state at all. We can see this in a letter from Malatesta to Luigi Fabbri discussing the Russian Revolution in 1919:

> But perhaps the truth is simply this: our pro-Bolshevik friends take the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labor, and trying to build a society and organize a

> Berkman, *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism*)

Exploitation and Surplus-Labor

So far I've talked about in a very general way about the capitalist production process and how workers are made to do surplus-labor to enrich the capitalists and landlords. The working class does all the work, as the name implies, while these owning class live off the labor of others because they own what other people use. This explains the process simply and generally, but to get a better understanding, we can look at a simplified example analyzing the relation between a single capitalist and a single worker using some basic math.

Let's say a capitalist hires a worker for $120 per day to make widgets. Each widget requires $5 worth of raw material, and the labor-process also causes wear-and-tear on the tools and machinery the workers use, depreciating them by, let's say, $1 per widget. We can also say that each widget can be sold for $12. We will ignore any other costs needed for producing and selling these widgets for now for the sake of simplicity.

Suppose the worker produces 20 widgets each day. In this case, the capitalist will have spent $100 on raw material, $20 on wear-and-tear for the tools and machinery, and $120 on the worker's daily wage. In total, they have spent $240 to produce 20 widgets. Coincidentally, since these widgets sell for $12 each, the capitalist also only receives $240 from the sale of the 20 widgets the worker made.

In summary:

- Total Cost for producing 20 widgets = $240
  - Raw Materials = $5 per widget x 20 widgets = $100
  - Wear-and-Tear on Means of Production = $1 per widget x 20 widgets = $20

  - A day's wage = $120

- Total Revenue from selling 20 widgets = $12 per widget x 20 widgets = $240

- Profit = Total Revenue — Total Cost = $240 — $240 = $0

This is a terrible result for the capitalist, who demands that they receive more than they contributed. They did not expect to get an *equivalent* from all this purchasing and selling, but an *excess*. They expected a profit. But how can they get it?

Let's say that the wage-laborer produces 10 widgets per hour. They therefore only need 2 hours to make 20 widgets. Since they were paid $120 for a day's labor, which in this case is only 2 hours long, they are effectively being paid $60 per hour.

But what if the capitalist decided to extend the length of the working-day from 2 hours to 8 hours, yet pay the worker the same $120 daily wage? In that case, the worker will be making the same amount of money each day, yet the amount of work they must do has quadrupled. Instead of making $60 per hour, they now only make $15 per hour.

Since the worker is laboring for four times as long, they are also making four times as many widgets. They produce 80 widgets instead of only 20. The capitalist needs to buy even more raw materials, and tools and machinery are used up more in the daily labor process. The capitalist now spends $400 on raw materials, $80 on wear-and-tear for tools and machinery, but still spends $120 on the worker's daily wage. In total, the capitalist spends $600 to have 80 widgets made. But by selling 80 widgets for $12 each, they make $960 in revenue.

In summary:

- Total Cost for producing 80 widgets = $600
  - Raw Materials = $5 per widget x 80 widgets = $400

> of the so-called anarchists for the abolition of the state out of hand. (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*)

While Engels dismissed the "so-called anarchists" here, he at the same time highlights the problems in talking about a "workers' state" which we will see supports the anarchist position.

The best defense of talking about a workers' state by this understanding is to point to their one major point of similarity: that there is an organized fighting force acting on behalf of some economic class. If this is all the state is, then the workers' state is truly a state. (By this broad of a definition, anarchists would also similarly support workers forming such a "state."[11])

However, the function here is also rather unique since this organization is explicitly *not* being formed for the purpose of maintaining the power to exploit and dominate a lower class in perpetuity. Rather, it was there explicitly to resist exploitation from being imposed upon them and then, once this purpose is fulfilled and the threat is ended, dissolve. We see this above as Engels says the proletariat, by wielding the state, "abolishes also the state as state." He also believed that actual attempts at a workers' revolution, like the Paris Commune, "ceased to be a state in the true sense of the term."[12]

Later you have Vladimir Lenin represent the Marxist position like this:

> In other words, under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the

[11] Engels' critique of anarchism often reduces to this kind of semantic point and his mistaken belief that anarchists were calling for a kind of absolute pacifism, thinking that things can be achieved "overnight." Or at least he pretended to believe this to slander them during his conflict with Bakunin. I cover this in great detail in Read On Authority.

[12] Letter from Engels to August Bebel, March 1875

exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage-labour). The state was the official representative of society as a whole; the gathering of it together into a visible embodiment. But it was this only in so far as it was the state of that class which itself represented, for the time being, society as a whole: in ancient times, the state of slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, the feudal lords; in our own time, the bourgeoisie. When at last it becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not "abolished". *It dies out.* This gives the measure of the value of the phrase "a free people's state", both as to its justifiable use at times by agitators, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency; and also of the demands

  - Wear-and-Tear on Means of Production = $1 per widget x 80 widgets = $80
  - A day's wage = $120

- Total Revenue from selling 80 widgets = $12 per widget x 80 widgets = $960

- Profit = Total Revenue — Total Cost = $960 — $600 = $360

As we can see, while before the capitalist gained no profit at all, they now have a profit of $360, which is 60% more than what they spent. The ultimate source of this surplus comes from the surplus-labor of the working classes laboring to support the owning classes this way.

This is, again, an extremely simplified version of this dynamic. The relation between workers and the capitalists are complicated by market competition, but it expresses this basic underlying point. The capitalists and landlords live off the surplus-product produced by the surplus-labor of the entire working class. Some amount of the total social product does not go to the workers who produced it, but to the owning classes simply because they own every element of the production process. In individual cases, this appears as the worker being made to work longer hours (or work at a greater level of intensity) and at lower wages so that the capitalists can make a profit.

This kind of analysis is fairly popular in socialist literature, especially in the late 19th and early 20th century. This specific kind of presentation is often seen in the works of Karl Marx and his book *Capital* (with the above example largely being essentially an adaptation of *Capital* Vol. 1, Ch. 7), which was very well received by anarchists.[4] Anarchists often find themselves

[4] Mikhail Bakunin highly praised Marx's *Capital* in his essay The Capitalist System: "Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Oekonomie, by Karl Marx; Erster Band. This work will need to be translated into French, because nothing, that I know of, contains an analysis so profound, so luminous, so

in agreement with Marx's analysis of capitalism, despite the fact that he was not an anarchist and led a major conflict with the anarchists over the best ways to resist and defeat capitalism.[5]

Similar kinds of analysis can be found before Marx too. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon described the exploitation of the worker by describing how, while capitalists pay each worker their daily wage to live and work each day, they leave the 'collective force' of the workers combined unpaid, as workers can do more together than they could separately.

Proudhon puts it this way in *What is Property* (1840):

> A force of one thousand men working twenty days has been paid the same wages that one would be paid for working fifty-five years; but this force of one thousand has done in twenty days what a single man could not have accomplished, though he had labored for a million centuries. Is the exchange

scientific, so decisive, and if I can express it thus, so merciless an expose of the formation of bourgeois capital and the systematic and cruel exploitation that capital continues exercising over the work of the proletariat. The only defect of this work… positivist in direction, based on a profound study of economic works, without admitting any logic other than the logic of the facts — the only defect, say, is that it has been written, in part, but only in part, in a style excessively metaphysical and abstract… which makes it difficult to explain and nearly unapproachable for the majority of workers, and it is principally the workers who must read it nevertheless. The bourgeois will never read it or, if they read it, they will never want to comprehend it, and if they comprehend it they will never say anything about it; this work being nothing other than a sentence of death, scientifically motivated and irrevocably pronounced, not against them as individuals, but against their class." Carlo Cafiero, whose conflict with Engels I explain in How Engels Failed Italy, also helped to address this singular 'defect' by writing a Summary of Marx's *Capital*. Despite the conflict Cafiero had with Marx and Engels, Cafiero clearly considers it a great work, and Marx likewise approved of Cafiero's popular summary, praising it as the best he'd seen, avoiding the errors of other summaries which focused too heavily on pedantic and academic elements.

[5] See my paper How Engels Failed Italy to see one part of that conflict.

> just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital. (Friedrich Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Ch. IX)

Because an essential feature of the state was the violent enforcement of the rule of one class over another, and the ultimate aim of socialism was the abolition of all class rule, it naturally followed that a future socialist society would be stateless. Any state would become entirely vestigial, and any other essential functions it might also provide (e.g. building roads, running hospitals, delivering mail, etc.) would be taken over by other institutions or would at least lose their 'political' character.

However, in the view of Marx, Engels, and many other socialists, the only way we could arrive at socialism would be through a "workers' state," sometimes called the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Since the capitalists and their state are violently imposing themselves upon the workers, it was necessary for the workers to, when necessary, violently resist when the capitalists and state refuse to stand down.

Engels famously represents this position in *Anti-Dühring*:

> *The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property.* But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state. Society thus far, based upon class antagonisms, had need of the state, that is, of an organisation of the particular class, which was *pro tempore* the exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the

duction, the workers will naturally resist their oppression. If any such system is going to remain over time, the economic ruling class will need the support of their own organized body of armed men that will violently enforce their claim over the means of production. Thus, when the workers form a labor union and go on strike, the capitalists will also direct strike-breakers to beat them down. If the workers threaten to seize the means of production for themselves, the cops or even the army do this instead.

It is clear from practice that the modern state, which arose alongside capitalism, fulfills the function of violently enforcing bourgeois property rights, and is largely made up of, and acts in the interest of, capitalists. Historically, this can also be compared to older states in prior modes of production, as with the feudal states that upheld the power of the monarchy and aristocracy, or more ancient states like the Roman Empire which enforced its system of slave labor.

Because of this it became common among the broader socialist movement, and not just among anarchists, to associate the state with not just any form of organization or use of delegates, and not even just any organized fighting force, but specifically with one that enforces the power of one economic class against another.

We therefore find Friedrich Engels, Marx's close friend and ally, describing the state like this:

> As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slaves,

> an equitable one? Once more, no; when you have paid all the individual forces, the collective force still remains to be paid. Consequently, there remains always a right of collective property which you have not acquired, and which you enjoy unjustly.
>
> Admit that twenty days' wages suffice to feed, lodge, and clothe this multitude for twenty days: thrown out of employment at the end of that time, what will become of them, if, as fast as they create, they abandon their creations to the proprietors who will soon discharge them? While the proprietor, firm in his position (thanks to the aid of all the laborers), dwells in security, and fears no lack of labor or bread, the laborer's only dependence is upon the benevolence of this same proprietor, to whom he has sold and surrendered his liberty. If, then, the proprietor, shielding himself behind his comfort and his rights, refuses to employ the laborer, how can the laborer live? He has ploughed an excellent field, and cannot sow it; he has built an elegant and commodious house, and cannot live in it; he has produced all, and can enjoy nothing.

We need not get too far into the complexities of the analysis of *Capital* here. We can even, to some extent, avoid the issues about Marx's so-called "labor theory of value," (or, as Diane Elson defended it, his "value theory of labor") and debates over whether this theory is correct. The point being made here is not about how socially necessary labor-time becomes crystallized as value, which is transformed into prices.

The question of whether exploitation exists is much simpler, examining control over the means of production being used to make workers do surplus-labor and create

surplus-products which support and enrich a distinct class which controls the means of production, regardless of whether these products exist as commodities and must be transformed by some market process. Exploitation long predates capitalism, and consequently predates the product of the worker's labor presenting itself as a 'value' as Marx imagines it.[6]

> Capital has not invented surplus-labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian caloς cagaqoς [well-to-do man], Etruscan theocrat, *civis Romanus* [Roman citizen], Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 10)

Considering this, we can also highlight capitalism reliance on surplus-labor by comparing it to a system that is more plainly exploitative, like feudal serfdom. Feudalism is not the same thing as capitalism. In contrast to the capitalists fighting things out in the competitive market, the feudal lord's power is primarily found in ownership of the land and is secured in a series of hereditary titles of nobility. The serfs who work for these lords are not selling their labor-power for a wage, but are legally tied to certain plots of land they are required to work. The serf and the wage-laborer are therefore in two very different positions. However, the serf, like the wage-laborer, is being forced to do the agricultural labor necessary for their

[6] Diane Elson makes the same point in the beginning of her paper *The Value Theory of Labour*. I also cover this in my notes on her paper.

resources, driven by this endless need for profit. These wars not only mean more, largely poor workers are sent off to kill and die violent deaths in the name of the economic ruling classes, but also misdirects even more labor to the production of arms and weapons of terrifying scale.

Socialist Views of the State

We have seen that the central issues of capitalism cannot be reformed away. Exploitation and domination are both inherent features of capitalism which cannot be abolished without abolishing capitalism itself. We have also seen that, within capitalism, different degrees of exploitation and domination are possible. This therefore leaves open the possibility of certain "reforms" to the system that reduce the misery and immiseration of the workers.

These reforms generally come from two different sources. The first is from the demands of the workers themselves. Perhaps the most basic and straightforward example of this would be seen in a labor strike demanding higher wages, benefits, or implementation of other measures for the workers' safety and comfort.

However, we also need to consider how these measures can be applied by the state. To understand the anarchist position here, we should also briefly touch on the anarchist view of the state, which also needs to be understood within the context of how socialists talked about the state in the 19th and early 20th century and how theory relates to how these terms are defined. The most important contrast here is between anarchism and Marxism.

Anarchists, and socialists more broadly, argue that the state exists because of class conflict between the workers and the capitalists. Since the economic ruling classes exploit and dominate the workers through their control over the means of pro-

> the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality. By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 15)

The control of the capitalists over production does not just come from their direct control over their own means of production. It also comes from the fact that, thanks to this system of exploitation, they are able to hoard comparatively massive levels of wealth. In 2022 it was estimated that the ten richest men in the world own six times as much wealth as the bottom 40% of the world, roughly 3.1 billion people, combined.[10]

While markets are often said to be following "supply and demand," what is "demanded" doesn't match what people actually want and need. Rather, it is concerned with demand *backed by money*. If you are poor and starving, your demand for food is worthless because you have nothing to buy that food with. Likewise, if you are rich, workers will be forced to cater to your needs. Labor is, therefore, grossly misdirected in this system as the production of necessities is neglected in favor of the frivolous luxuries of the capitalists.

Often, the satisfaction of these demands will impose additional burdens and harms on the poor, like when noisy, odorous, and polluting factories are placed next to poor neighborhoods. In these ways, the capitalists can impose themselves on the poor workers even when they are not employed by them. In some of the most extreme cases this even leads to war. Competition on the market between capitalists can translate into competition between countries, each side wanting control over

[10] From the Guardian article "World's 10 richest men see their wealth double during Covid pandemic" by Larry Elliott

own survival, but are forced to do surplus-labor on top of that to support and enrich the lords.

Marx shows that, with a few social and legal changes, we can see how a feudal lord might be "transformed" into the position of a capitalist, and the serf into a wage-laborer:

> Let us take a peasant liable to do compulsory service for his lord. He works on his own land, with his own means of production, for, say, 3 days a week. The 3 other days he does forced work on the lord's domain. He constantly reproduces his own labour-fund, which never, in his case, takes the form of a money payment for his labour, advanced by another person. But in return, his unpaid forced labour for the lord, on its side, never acquires the character of voluntary paid labour. If one fine morning the lord appropriates to himself the land, the cattle, the seed, in a word, the, means of production of this peasant, the latter will thenceforth be obliged to sell his labour-power to the lord. He will, *ceteris paribus*, labour 6 days a week as before, 3 for himself, 3 for his lord, who thenceforth becomes a wages-paying capitalist. As before, he will use up the means of production as means of production, and transfer their value to the product. As before, a definite portion of the product will be devoted to reproduction. But from the moment that the forced labour is changed into wage labour, from that moment the labour-fund, which the peasant himself continues as before to produce and reproduce, takes the form of a capital advanced in the form of wages by the lord. (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 23)

While the legal relation between the wage-laborer and capitalist is different from that of the serf and the lord, and the

worker is now "freed" from the means of production (the land) they were tied to, we still have the same underlying relation of exploitation.[7]

Capitalism swept into dominance with the Industrial Revolution, leaving feudal serfdom as an outdated relic. Yet it has not achieved a free society. This is not, in the anarchist view, merely because the system is corrupt (even though it frequently is), but because of the nature of the system itself. From this analysis, this root problem can be traced back to the monopolization of the means of production, which in capitalism takes the form of the private ownership of the means of production, which everyone else uses. The solution to this, therefore, requires abolishing this system, replacing it with *socialized* means of production, owned by the workers themselves, and making decisions collectively.

This is generally seen as the common defining feature of different socialist theories, which are distinguished according to how they believe such a system could function and the best way of arriving at this system.

Capitalism is Involuntary

The reformist may still be unconvinced. While there are certainly some similarities to feudal peasants and modern wage-laborers, there are also key distinctions. The most obvious distinction is that the wage-laborer is "free." As Marx points out,

[7] I do something a bit similar in my paper Property is Despotism!, critiquing Murray Rothbard's "anarcho"-capitalism as really being a kind of neo-feudalism. In examining the fictional absolute monarchy of Ruritania, I highlight how all the same justifications of property that Rothbard offers also allows King Charlie to justify a complete totalitarian dictatorship, which by Rothbard's own standards must now be called "anarchist." While Rothbard is something of a special case among bourgeois economists defending capitalism, a similar point could be made even if Ruritania transformed into a "constitutional monarchy" instead.

> they develop into. They engage in forms of labor that maximize profit but actively harm them. The process of capitalist production produces not only goods and services, but also broken people unable to develop in a positive direction and fulfill their human potential. This point was frequently made by anarchists through the metaphor of workers being turned into machines. Wilson thought that capitalism had a tendency to transform workers into a "steam-engine with wages for coal." For Goldman, each worker became "a mere particle of a machine, with less will and decision than his master of steel and iron. Man is being robbed not merely of the products of his labor, but of the power of free initiative, of originality and the interests in, or desire for, the things he is making." As a result, workers are reduced to being "living corpses without originality or power of initiative, human machines of flesh and blood who pile up mountains of wealth for others and pay for it with a grey, dull, and wretched existence for themselves." (Zoe Baker, *Means and Ends*)

Similar ideas are found throughout socialist literature of this period. Marx's idea of alienation absolutely fits in here, as does Marx and Engels' frequent use of this same metaphor of workers as being turned into a "mere living appendage" of lifeless machines, especially when factory labor is contrasted to handicraft manufacturing.

> Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour-process, but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ

the worker become a sycophant, to be grateful and thank them for this opportunity to be exploited and letting the workers keep a fraction of what they created.

Élisée Reclus described this in his essay "Anarchy" as a contrast to how things work between equals:

> This sacrosanct system of domination encompasses a long succession of superimposed classes in which the highest have the right to command and the lowest have the duty to obey. The official morality consists in bowing humbly to one's superiors and in proudly holding up one's head before one's subordinates. Each person must have, like Janus, two faces, with two smiles: one flattering, solicitous, and even servile, and the other haughty and nobly condescending. The principle of authority (which is the proper name for this phenomenon) demands that the superior should never give the impression of being wrong, and that in every verbal exchange he should have the last word. But above all, his orders must be carried out. (Élisée Reclus, Anarchy)

The worker is therefore trapped in a system where they are driven to produce as much as possible, as fast as possible, with little in the way of relief and in a system where their lives are devalued, seen as interchangeable with others, and they are expected to simply obey orders robotically.

Zoe Baker makes this point as she continues:

> The economic ruling classes also determine what forms of labor workers engage in and so the kind of capacities, drives, and consciousness they develop during the process of production itself. Workers lack control over the kind of people

the character of the labor has changed, turning from "unpaid forced labour" into "voluntary paid labour." Unlike the peasant, they are not legally tied to a certain plot of land. The wage-laborer freely contracts with the capitalist, selling their labor-power on the market, and they may quit at any time they want.

The anarchist response to this objection is to show how the supposedly "voluntary" nature of capitalism is illusory. Baker elaborates on this a little further on in *Means and Ends*:

> Anarchists advocated the abolition of capitalism because it is based on the oppression and exploitation of the working classes. Wage laborers allegedly choose to sell their labor to capitalists and landowners, but only do so because they have no other option. Under capitalism, a small minority owns the land, raw materials, and the means of production. Workers own personal possessions, such as their hat or sewing kit, but they do not own private property like a factory or mine. As a result, the majority of the population lacks the means to survive independently through their own labor. In order to gain access to the goods and services they need to survive—such as food, clothing, and shelter—workers have to purchase them with money. Given their social position, the only realistic way to earn this money is to sell their labor to capitalists and landowners in exchange for a wage.[8] Workers choose to engage in wage labor in the same manner that a person

[8] Malatesta, *Method of Freedom*, 493. Taken from Malatesta's "Some Thoughts on the Post-Revolutionary Property System": "Our opponents, the beneficiaries and defenders of the current social system, are in the habit of justifying the right to private property by stating that property is the condition and guarantee of liberty. And we agree with them. Do we not say repeatedly that poverty is slavery? But then, why do we oppose them? The reason is clear: in reality the property that they defend is capitalist property,

> might choose to hand over their possessions to an armed robber. The robbery victim makes this choice because the only realistic alternative is being attacked. Workers similarly sell their labor to capitalists and landowners because the only realistic alternative is extreme poverty, homelessness, starvation, and so on. It is an involuntary decision forced upon workers by the fundamental structure of capitalist society.[9]

While it is true that the worker in some sense chooses to work for the capitalist, contracting with them in the market and having the legal right to quit, the supposedly voluntary nature of this act is undermined by the fact that this choice is being coerced. The worker if give the option of "work or die" in a way not dissimilar from someone being robbed at gunpoint "choosing" to hand over their wallet. Collectively, the capitalists and landlords hold both the products the workers need to

namely property that allows its owners to live from the work of others and which therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed, forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value. Indeed, in all countries of the modem world the majority of the population must live by seeking work from those with a monopoly of the land and means of labour and when they obtain it they receive a wage that is always below its value and often barely sufficient to ward off starvation. This means that workers are subjected to a kind of slavery which, though it may vary in degree of harshness, always means social inferiority, material penury and moral degradation, and is the primary cause of all the ills that beset today's social order. To bring freedom to all, to allow everyone, in full freedom, to gain the maximum degree of moral and material development, and enjoy all the benefits that nature and labour can bestow, everyone must have their own property; everyone, that is, must have the right to that piece of land and those raw materials and tools and equipment that are needed to work and produce without exploitation and oppression. And since we cannot expect the propertied classes to spontaneously surrender the privileges they have usurped, the workers will have to expropriate that property and it must become the property of all."

[9] Berkman, *Anarchism*, 11–12; Malatesta, *Café*, 45.

> subordinated to the will of a master." (Zoe Baker, *Means and Ends*)

The main thing capitalists command is, of course, that the worker makes a profit for them. The ultimate source of this profit is the exploitation of the workers, who must do surplus-labor and make a surplus-product. The capitalist can do this, as we've seen, by extending the length of the working-day. The same effect can also be achieved by making wage-laborers work hard, increasing the intensity of their labor. Work longer and harder to make your boss richer.

The capitalist is pushed to do this, not only because of their greed for profit, but because they are forced by capitalist competition to reduce costs as much as possible. Capitalists want to hire as few people as possible, minimizing the amount they spend on wages, but also want to maximize the amount of labor they can squeeze out of their workers. This is what leads to the odd situation where we have a simultaneous crisis of people overworked and a mass of people left unemployed.

This drive to maximize profits, and therefore to economize on resources, also pushes capitalists to avoid "unnecessary" costs, by which I mean costs that are for the health, safety, and benefit of the workers. So long as the capitalist has their "reserve army of labour," as Marx put it, ready and willing to replace any worker who quits or is fired, the capitalist feels less need to be careful with preserving the lives of the people they directly employ. And, in fact, market competition will push them to disregard this, as the companies which avoid these supposedly unnecessary expenses get a competitive advantage.

On the other side, the worker knows that anything they do that might invoke the capitalist's anger can put their job, and therefore their means of life, at risk. The capitalists are always on the lookout for the formation of rebellious groups in the worker's ranks, forming labor unions. The capitalist demands

because it means the exploitation of the workers by an owning class who have monopolized the means of production.

This is also what we saw Bakunin emphasize earlier in his essay "The Capitalist System," asking us to "Note that I have left out of account altogether the following question: In what way did property and capital ever fall into the hands of their present owners?" What instead mattered was that the capitalists, "inasmuch as they live not by their own productive labor," gaining profit, interest, rent, etc., they "live at the expense of the proletariat."

Capitalism is Authoritarian

So far we have focused especially on the exploitative aspects of capitalism. But, by selling themselves to the capitalist, the wage-laborer is also made obedient to them. Once hired, the worker needs to do what they are commanded, and we have already seen how this state of servitude is forced on the worker involuntarily.

Zoe Baker continues her summary of the anarchist critique of capitalism by emphasizing this point:

> Wage labor is not only involuntary. It is based on a relationship of domination and subordination in which capitalists and landowners have the power to command workers to do as instructed. Malatesta described capitalism as a society in which "a few individuals have hoarded the land and all the instruments of production and can impose their will on the workers, in such a fashion that instead of producing to satisfy people's needs and with these needs in view, production is geared toward making a profit for the employers." Goldman similarly wrote that, under capitalism, workers "are

live and the means to creating these products hostage. This guarantees that people are forced to submit to their demands, forcing any rebellious worker who quits to come crawling back, ready and willing to sell themselves back into bondage. This might not be to the same individual member of the capitalist class, of course, but it must be one of them. In a real sense, the worker belongs to the capitalist class even before they sell themselves to any particular capitalist.

Marx presents this same point in *Capital*:

> Capitalist production, therefore, of itself reproduces the separation between labour-power and the means of labour. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the condition for exploiting the labourer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and labourer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the labourer belongs to capital before he has sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is both brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of masters, and by the oscillations in the market-price of labour-power. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 23)

Bakunin agreed with Marx here, emphasizing the distinction between how this looks from a 'juridical' viewpoint compared to an 'economic' one:

M. Karl Marx, the illustrious leader of German Communism, justly observed in his magnificent work *Das Kapital* that if the contract freely entered into by the vendors of money — in the form of wages — and the vendors of their own labor — that is, between the employer and the workers — were concluded not for a definite and limited term only, but for one's whole life, it would constitute real slavery. Concluded for a term only and reserving to the worker the right to quit his employer, this contract constitutes a sort of voluntary and transitory serfdom. Yes, transitory and voluntary from the juridical point of view, but nowise from the point of view of economic possibility. The worker always has the right to leave his employer, but has he the means to do so? And if he does quit him, is it in order to lead a free existence, in which he will have no master but himself? No, he does it in order to sell himself to another employer. He is driven to it by the same hunger which forced him to sell himself to the first employer. Thus the worker's liberty, so much exalted by the economists, jurists, and bourgeois republicans, is only a theoretical freedom, lacking any means for its possible realization, and consequently it is only a fictitious liberty, an utter falsehood. The truth is that the whole life of the worker is simply a continuous and dismaying succession of terms of serfdom — voluntary from the juridical point of view but compulsory in the economic sense — broken up by momentarily brief interludes of freedom accompanied by starvation; in other words, it is real slavery. (Bakunin, The Capitalist System)

his control over the means of production. Even if the worker realizes they are being exploited, they still face the alternative of "work or die."

Just as he leaves questions of administration to others, he offloads even the responsibility of defending himself to others. This is seen especially today in not only the dominance of explicitly right-wing media, but even the "liberal" media which, ultimately, remains owned by the capitalists, and which are beholden to their advertisers.

It is outside of the scope of this paper to respond to every defense of capital someone might advance, or be paid to advance. The main issue with any defense given will be that, ultimately, the profit of the capitalist and landlords comes because of their monopoly over the means of production allowing them to force others to do surplus-labor. Whatever other excuse here cannot obscure this fact. Neither can myths about the origins of capitalism, with tales of Robinson Crusoe or about the "original homesteader," change the nature of what people live in now.

I call attention to some of these points in Property is Despotism!, telling the story of the fictional absolute monarchy of Ruritania, ruled by King Charlie. While capitalism was in reality established by wars and conquest, seen especially in the practices of colonialism as the enclosure of the commons, bourgeois economists love myths showing how their principles of property and market exchange could, in theory, been established peacefully, with the first user gaining absolute rights over a thing for all time until they transfer it away. This is precisely the defense Rothbard gives, and the basis for his claim to support a free society. As I show with King Charlie though, this is in reality merely a defense of despotism by appealing to its supposedly legitimate origins, as Rothbard himself even seemed to recognize. While Ruritania isn't exactly capitalist, as it lacks a market, it highlights the clear problem with this kind of reasoning for anyone who claims to care about freedom. No matter how "legitimate" the origins, capitalism makes a society unfree

The capitalist's defense here is a bit of a misdirection.

Administrative work is a real and necessary kind of work, especially in large-scale organizations. The capitalist often presents himself, and is presented, as the person in-charge and making all the big high-level decisions for the company. They are, essentially, made to seem like a worker like any other, but doing much more important and more difficult work, justifying their enormous income.

But Marx rhetorically calls attention to this misdirection by having the capitalist's overlooker and manager hide their smiles. Administrative work is real work, which is precisely why capitalists can and do hire people to do this on their behalf. But in capitalism they are bent, just as the whole production system is bent, to act on behalf of the capitalists.

As capitalists, their profit comes from the exploitation of the wage-laborer, making them do surplus-labor. If a capitalist decides they also want to do work in addition to this, that is an entirely separate matter, as highlighted by the fact that someone else could be hired to do this on their behalf.

> Meanwhile, after a hearty laugh, he re-assumes his usual mien. Though he chanted to us the whole creed of the economists, in reality, he says, he would not give a brass farthing for it. He leaves this and all such like subterfuges and juggling tricks to the professors of Political Economy, who are paid for it. He himself is a practical man; and though he does not always consider what he says outside his business, yet in his business he knows what he is about. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

Finally, the capitalist here gives up any justifications. As the owner of the means of production, it doesn't matter that his arguments justifying his own position are weak. Instead, they are about power, and he has amassed enough power to keep

The reformist may raise an objection here. While it is true that workers face the choice of "work or die" in capitalism, there is a sense in which this is true of *every* economy. People need things like food, shelter, medicine, and so on to survive, and these require work to produce. Even if there were no capitalists, we would still face this choice. The alternative of "work or die" exists independently from capitalism.

Where this objection is confused is that it equates our physiological need for certain products with the threat made by the capitalist class. Nature presents us with the alternative of "drink water or die," and we therefore need to find and produce clean drinking water. But if someone corners the only source of fresh water and demands that we must obey his commands or he will deny us any water, including not only the labor of gathering the water but many other things as well, then this is a very different kind of alternative. The work we are being made to do here is not extending from natural necessity, but from the social system being imposed upon us.

This is precisely what makes the analogy of the armed robber so appropriate, except that what the robber does directly, the capitalists and landlords do more indirectly. Or, perhaps, we might think of it as the difference between an armed robber who holds you at gunpoint and a thief or kidnapper who demands a ransom for something or someone to be returned, as a "voluntary" exchange.

As the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta put it:

> There are two ways of oppressing men: either directly by brute force, by physical violence; or indirectly by denying them the means of life and thus reducing them to a state of surrender. The former is at the root of power, that is of political privilege; the latter was the origin of property, that is of economic privilege. (Malatesta, Anarchy)

The alternative of "work or die" presented to the wage-laborer is not purely a consequence of the need for certain products. It is, perhaps more accurately, understood as the threat "work *for a capitalist* or die." As we have seen, that demand also contains not only a demand that the workers produce for the capitalist an equivalent for what they are paid in wages, but also to produce a surplus beyond that to support and enrich the owning classes.

To quote Marx:

> Nature does not produce on the one side owners of money or commodities, and on the other men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no natural basis, neither is its social basis one that is common to all historical periods. It is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older forms of social production. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 6)

A Reformist Solution?

Our ever-hopeful reformer may think they have another solution to capitalism being involuntary: welfare.

Suppose that some capitalist society established certain programs which guaranteed all the basic necessities of life, funded perhaps by taxes placed on the capitalists themselves. It might distribute these goods and services directly, as with public housing and universal healthcare, or perhaps indirectly through programs like a universal basic income. For the sake of argument, we assume that this society, as far as possible, has eliminated any dilemma of "work or die" except the minimal amount required to produce necessities, which is determined by the productivity of labor and the level of technological development.

> him the equivalent service of changing his cotton and spindle into yarn? Moreover, there is here no question of service. A service is nothing more than the useful effect of a use-value, be it of a commodity, or be it of labour. But here we are dealing with exchange-value. The capitalist paid to the labourer a value of 3 shillings, and the labourer gave him back an exact equivalent in the value of 3 shillings, added by him to the cotton: he gave him value for value. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

The capitalist asserts they are the ones providing the worker with access to the means of production. Without that, the worker could not produce anything.

But as we've seen, the capitalists and landlords are only able to provide this access because they have taken these things "hostage" as their property.

Further, as Marx points out, while the capitalist has provided these things, in a sense the worker has also provided their labor-power. The capitalist isn't providing a 'service' here. They aren't doing a favor. They provided something and received an equivalent. If the capitalist wanted to present this as a favor, they'd need to fall back on one of the previous points, like appealing to their abstinence, and we've seen the problems there already.

> Our friend, up to this time so purse-proud, suddenly assumes the modest demeanour of his own workman, and exclaims: "Have I myself not worked? Have I not performed the labour of superintendence and of overlooking the spinner? And does not this labour, too, create value?" His overlooker and his manager try to hide their smiles. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

Marx's dismissal of this is clear. Even if we grant that the capitalist is practicing abstinence, they still receive an equivalent in this scenario. There is nowhere this "remuneration" could come from unless the worker is being exploited.

> But no, he becomes importunate. He says: "The yarn is of no use to me: I produced it for sale." In that case let him sell it, or, still better, let him for the future produce only things for satisfying his personal wants, a remedy that his physician MacCulloch has already prescribed as infallible against an epidemic of over-production. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

Here the capitalist points out that this production was not done for himself. Rather, the worker was hired to do commodity production.

But in this scenario, the worker *has* done commodity production. If the worker does no surplus-labor, only producing the equivalent of what they are paid in wages for the capitalist, their product is still a commodity.

> He now gets obstinate. "Can the labourer," he asks, "merely with his arms and legs, produce commodities out of nothing? Did I not supply him with the materials, by means of which, and in which alone, his labour could be embodied? And as the greater part of society consists of such ne'er-do-wells, have I not rendered society incalculable service by my instruments of production, my cotton and my spindle, and not only society, but the labourer also, whom in addition I have provided with the necessaries of life? And am I to be allowed nothing in return for all this service?" Well, but has not the labourer rendered

We set aside for now the question of whether this could be achieved in practice. For the capitalist, such programs would amount to a huge loss of leverage held over the working classes. Whenever things even close to this are implemented, like with free lunches being provided to children, the owning classes and their mouthpieces can't help but complain that we should have just turned to child labor instead. This, they claim, will prevent us from developing a society of "freeloaders" living off the labor of others. It is a great mystery how they who live on the surplus-labor of the working classes can say this without choking on the irony or dying of shame.

If the workers of a country, or the world, were ever able to truly establish such a system without abolishing capitalism in the process, we *still* would not have made this capitalist relation voluntary. What essentially makes this relation involuntary is not the fact that the worker is faced with an alternative of "work or die," strictly speaking. While this is the most extreme form this involuntary choice can take, and it is the alternative most workers face in practice, this does not transform the nature of capitalism itself.

Bringing things back to our analogy of the robber or kidnapper, if, instead of threatening to shoot you or their hostage dead unless you hand them your wallet, they merely threatened to cut you with a knife or non-fatally beat you up, this would not suddenly validate their actions. Likewise, even if the capitalist could no longer threaten you with death, they have still monopolized control over the means of production and will only permit people to access it on the condition that they do surplus-labor.

But the fact remains that capitalists *do* threaten workers with death, and will oppose any reforms to change this. I deny that a universal basic income or any kind of welfare equivalent could fix the basic issues with capitalism, even in theory. In practice, I believe that any society where the workers are strong enough that they could completely withdraw their labor

from capitalism will also be one where they could and would do away with capitalism altogether.

Other, less radical reforms are even *less* capable of solving these fundamental issues with capitalism.

Take attempts at raising the minimum wage, for example. We can, on the one hand, recognize that raising the wages of workers would do a substantial amount of good. We do not need to go as far as some socialists, and even some anarchists, in denying that minimum wage increases can do no good at all. According to them, any increase in nominal wages by something like a minimum wage increase or even the negotiated end of a labor strike would be counteracted by subsequent increases in the prices of things workers buy. By this "iron law of wages," workers can make no progress within capitalism whatsoever. Similar objections are still common today, as when people complain that raising the minimum wage will only lead to greater inflation.

We can see from our analysis above that this is not necessary. As we've seen, the workers labor to produce not only the products that they will consume, but also the surplus on top of that, which is consumed by the capitalists and landlords. Or, individually, the worker produces a product which can be sold for more than the capitalist paid to have it produced, including their wages. In other words, they are made to do surplus-labor in addition to the necessary labor where they create an equivalent of what they are being paid.

If this surplus-labor were eliminated entirely, the capitalists would, as we saw before, end production. They only permit the worker to produce if they expect this to benefit themselves. Otherwise, they'd simply withhold the means of production entirely, and the worker could only continue to produce if they expropriated the means of production.

However, the proportion between this necessary labor and surplus-labor remains an open question. In Marx's example, the peasant who became a wage-laborer worked 3 days for him-

> He tries persuasion. "Consider my abstinence; I might have played ducks and drakes with the 15 shillings; but instead of that I consumed it productively, and made yarn with it." Very well, and by way of reward he is now in possession of good yarn instead of a bad conscience; and as for playing the part of a miser, it would never do for him to relapse into such bad ways as that; we have seen before to what results such asceticism leads. Besides, where nothing is, the king has lost his rights; whatever may be the merit of his abstinence, there is nothing wherewith specially to remunerate it, because the value of the product is merely the sum of the values of the commodities that were thrown into the process of production. Let him therefore console himself with the reflection that virtue is its own reward. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

Now the capitalist gets more philosophical, and tries to persuade the worker of how this profit is deserved because of his own hardships.

This "abstinence theory" claims that the capitalist, by investing their money, advancing it as capital, they have foregone consumption goods they could have had instead. The capitalist's contribution, by this theory, is found in their self-denial.

This seems like a strange theory on its face. We are told that it is the poor worker, figuring out whatever they can to scrape by in their humble home, who is living an indulgent lifestyle because they live paycheck to paycheck, consuming their entire income on necessities. But the capitalist, who lives large in their opulent mansions and many yachts, has learned the secret of abstinence because, even after all their spending on luxury, they have more left over to set aside and continue exploiting the worker, forcing them to do surplus-labor.

making $60 per hour, leaving the capitalist with no profit because no surplus-labor was performed, Marx did the same before recording the laments of this fictional capitalist.

> Our capitalist, who is at home in his vulgar economy, exclaims: "Oh! but I advanced my money for the express purpose of making more money." The way to Hell is paved with good intentions, and he might just as easily have intended to make money, without producing at all. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

The first complaint is that the capitalist advanced their money intending to make a profit.

But intentions count for little. This alone does not entitle the capitalist to receive, in addition to the equivalent provided by the worker, a surplus on top of that.

> He threatens all sorts of things. He won't be caught napping again. In future he will buy the commodities in the market, instead of manufacturing them himself. But if all his brother capitalists were to do the same, where would he find his commodities in the market? And his money he cannot eat. (Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, Ch. 7)

Next the capitalist threatens that, if he is not going to make a profit, then he will not advance his wealth like this again. Instead he will just buy things for himself on the market.

But if all capitalists did this, then nothing would be produced at all, and they'd have nothing to spend on. This only reinforces that the real power and basis for capitalist profit is not their contribution, but that they have taken the means of production hostage.

self and 3 days for his lord. Let's say that these 3 days are the bare minimum amount the worker needs to survive according to this level of labor productivity, and therefore cannot be reduced for long without the worker starving to death. However, even if the worker is still made to labor for 6 days each week, we could have the worker labor for 4 days so the capitalist only gets 2 days of surplus-labor, or 5 days so he only gets 1. In other words, wages could increase at the cost of profit.

This point was made by Malatesta:

> In spite of what some say, there exists no natural law (law of wages) which determines what part of a worker's labour should go to him; or if one wants to formulate a law, it could not be but that: wages cannot normally be less than what is needed to maintain life, nor can they normally rise such that no profit margin is left to the boss.
>
> It is clear that in the first case workers would die, and therefore would stop drawing any wages, and in the second the bosses would stop employing labour and so would pay no more wages. But between these two impossible extremes there is an infinite scale of degrees ranging from the miserable conditions of many land workers to the almost respectable conditions of skilled workers in the large cities.
>
> Wages, hours, and other conditions of employment are the result of the struggle between bosses and workers. The former try to give the workers as little as possible and get them to work themselves to the bone; the latter try, or should try to work as little, and earn as much, as possible. Where workers accept any conditions, or even being discontented, do not know how to put up

> effective resistance to the bosses demands, they are soon reduced to bestial conditions of life. Where, instead, they have ideas as to how human beings should live and know how to join forces, and through refusal to work or the latent and open threat of rebellion, to win the bosses respect, in such cases, they are treated in a relatively decent way. One can therefore say that within certain limits, the wages he gets are what the worker (not as an individual, of course, but as a class) demands. (Errico Malatesta, An Anarchist Programme)

Anarchists deny that we can achieve the emancipation of the working class through reforms, but it does not follow that reforms, whether imposed by law or better yet by the strength of the workers' own labor unions, cannot materially benefit the workers and ease their pain. We are rapidly coming up on May Day which marks, among other things, the heroic struggle of the Chicago anarchists who were martyred over their fight for the eight-hour working-day in the Haymarket Affair. The memory of their bravery and sacrifice is still remembered today and inspires workers the world over, showing us that change is possible and inspiring the imagination of the workers of the world to demand better.

Notes on Common Ideological Defenses of Capital

When people become sufficiently wealthy from the exploitation of a lower class, they begin to develop systems of belief and justifications for why they deserve this and that the system that puts them on top is good and just. For monarchists it was the "divine right of kings," for fascists it was the triumph

of the "master race," and for capitalists it is a whole series of fables and principles.

The human bias towards normalcy and the massive propaganda machines these capitalists pay for helps to popularize these ideas, even in the brains of the working classes, including our would-be reformists. Even hearing this description of how capitalism exploits workers, making them do surplus-labor, and seeing its parallels to clear oppression as in the relation between lords and serfs, our friendly reformist may still feel like there remains some other good reason to keep capitalism around. Most likely these reasons are going to be the same ones that the capitalists themselves come up with.

In my essays critiquing propertarianism, I address some of the most extreme versions of these excuses, looking at the so-called non-aggression principle or Ayn Rand's contradictory idea of "ultimate values." I also previously did a plain-language summary of Proudhon's What is Property, where he addresses many more major justifications, namely appealing to natural rights, to occupancy, and to labor. All of these approaches are dangerous for the capitalist because, as Proudhon points out, any natural right to property must also be universal, whereas the property of the capitalist is premised on them monopolizing it. Appeals to occupancy, even if we ignore the bloody history of conquest for capitalism, likewise fails as it is the worker who actually uses and occupies the means of production, not the capitalist or landlord. Finally, labor as a justification is even more absurd, as it is of course the laborer who labors, whereas the capitalist is trying to justify appropriating the worker's surplus-labor.

I leave my full analysis of these points to those essays. Here I'd rather highlight a few more excuses given by Marx in *Capital*. I styled my above explanation of surplus-labor in the same kind of style as Marx, who examined a worker spinning yarn in contrast to my widget-maker. And just as I first considered the worker laboring for only 2 hours and