

Listen, Leftist! Violence is not Revolutionary.

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Abstract: Murray Bookchin's well-known essay 'Listen, Marxist!' argues that Marxist methods of revolutionary change have not been liberating. The essay is a call to Leftists to develop the means for a truly liberating society that looks to the future rather than the past; which does not reinforce or recreate hierarchy; and which can offer an effective alternative to capitalism. He suggests that this can be done by adopting anarchist principles that are able to transform social relationships rather than recreate oppression in new forms. The core of Bookchin's essay is his recognition of the inextricable relationship between means and ends. He writes, "The organisation we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create." The argument I present in this paper agrees with Bookchin's critique, but takes his position on means and ends further, to what I will suggest is its full conclusion. I argue that if Leftists want to achieve a social revolution which creates non-oppressive societies, they need to reject violence as a method of change, and recognise that violence is not revolutionary but in fact incredibly conservative. While I do not label Bookchin as violent (not a pacifist, but he certainly favoured nonviolence), I suggest that violence, by its nature, is another major factor that acts to recreate the very things that Bookchin is seeking to remove. In this way, I am adding onto his argument. While this paper, through Bookchin, is positioned in an anarchist context, I will challenge the common arguments of other prominent revolutionary Leftists, not only anarchists, who defend the use of violence. This is because anarchists and other Leftists use similar rationale for the use of violence as a tool of revolutionary change. I do this by challenging three myths about violence: violence as necessary and productive; violence as intrinsically valuable; violence as psychologically liberating. The conclusion is that if leftist visions of social revolution are to be achieved, Leftists need to listen to pacifist voices that many have failed to take seriously for a long time.

Keywords: Anarchism; Marxism; Pacifism; Violence; Nonviolence; Revolution

Bookchin, Means and Ends, and the Left Moving Forward

Bookchin's (1971) famous *Listen, Marxist!* article, published in the 1970's, provided a head-on critique of the left, especially the Marxist left. He challenged the revolutionary left to live the revolution now in order to create the revolution in the future, writing that "the organization we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create". Bookchin's position is basically that the ends of social transformation – a social transformation that will "dissolve hierarchy, class rule and coercion to make it possible for each individual to gain control of his everyday life... to make each moment as marvellous as it could be and the life span of each individual an utterly fulfilling experience" - is inseparable from the means of leftist organisation. He argues that traditional Marxist positions on what Bookchin terms "the myth of the proletariat" and "the myth of the party" need to be reconsidered in the post-scarcity society. Leftists need to take an honest look at the past and present, and implement necessary changes to leftist strategy, and live the revolution now. He argued that leftists need to realise that the classical revolutionary-worker era is over, become more reflexive, and focus on fostering new ways of being rather than leading others and converting them to the "truth".

Bookchin's *Listen, Marxist!* was written as times were changing, moving further and further way from the last major leftist experiment in Catalonia, into what Bookchin called "post-scarcity" and towards the neo-liberal future. In this moment, he attempted to look to the future of the Left, while analysing where it was currently at and where it was heading. After previously being a Stalinist, and then a Trotskyist, by 1948, Bookchin had already come to a realisation that the working class were not going to be the sole agents of change (Biehl, 2007, p20). This completed his shift to anarchism. He describes this shift in the 1983 Documentary film *Anarchism in America* (Fischler and Sucher, 1983), stating that:

[The] workers movement had never really had the revolutionary potentialities that Marx attributed to them. The factory, which is supposed to organise the workers, in Marx's language, mobilise them and instil in them the class consciousness that is to stem out of a conflict between wage labour and capital, in fact had created habits of mind in the worker that served to regiment the worker. That served in fact to assimilate the worker to the work ethic, to the industrial routine, to hierarchical forms of organisation, and that no matter how compellingly Marx had argued that such a movement could have revolutionary consequences, in fact such a movement could have nothing but a purely adaptive function, an adjunct to the capitalist system itself.

This led him to his exploration of anarchism, and the political program he dedicated himself later in his life, libertarian municipalism:

And I began to try and explore what were movements and ideologies if you like that really were liberatory... Increasingly, I came to the conclusion that if we were to avoid, or if we are to avoid, the mistakes that were made over one hundred years of proletarian socialism, if we are to really achieve a liberatory movement, not simply in terms of economic questions but in terms of every aspect of life, we would have to turn to anarchism because it alone posed the problem not merely of class domination but hierarchical domination. And it alone posed the question not simply of economic exploitation but exploitation in every sphere of life.

Bookchin's arguments for adopting anarchism over Marxism, as the theoretical guide that can create the social transformation desired by all leftists, is based upon two factors. The first, is that anarchism challenges the whole problem because it positions itself against domination and exploitation, which if exist in society can be seen as the antithesis of what a leftist vision of the desired society. Domination and exploitation are clearly created by capitalism, but also exist in the state, and as Bookchin notes in this interview, in the family, in the school and

in sexual relationships. Domination and exploitation have existed in many pre-capitalist societies and could exist in other yet to be conceived of or experienced societies. This means that anarchism not only seeks to resolve the problem within our current situation, within capitalism, but the whole problem, in any society, from the micro level of personal relationships to macro level of how whole societies are organised.

The second, is the argument based on the interdependent relationship between means and ends, optimized by Bookchin's statement that "the organization we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create". Put simply, our actions are constitutive. This is a core part of anarchist organisation and practice as anarchists try to live the revolution now. They remove domination from their organisational and personal relationships now. They aim to be anarchists in the present rather than the future and create spaces that operate in ways that are consistent with anarchist tenants. This second factor is interlinked with the first. It is in fact the basis of the first. Domination and exploitation have to be removed to create the cause for non-dominatory and non-exploitative societies. This involves removing capitalism, but not only removing capitalism as capitalism, while being a major cause of domination and exploitation at the current time, is not the only cause of these things.

I do not mean to say that Bookchin accepted or advocated for everything that was labelled anarchist.¹ Nor am I saying that Bookchin wholly rejected Marxism, but instead encouraged Leftists to take the best from both Marxism and Anarchism forward (Bookchin, 2014, cited in Harvey, 2015). It is not my aim in this paper to offer a detailed explanation of Bookchin's thought, nor to fully engage with his argument. Instead, I take *Listen, Marxist!*, which encompasses Bookchin's means/ends realisation, as a launch point.

¹ For example, see another famous article from later in his life called "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm" (Bookchin, 1995). Bookchin even distanced himself from the anarchist label towards the end of his life (Beihl, 2007).

At the current time, one hundred years on from the Russian Revolution and after thirty years of neo-liberal reform, the Left finds itself in another period of reflection, reassessment and discussions of how to move forward. In the last three decades especially, the left has continuously weakened as unions have been decimated and inequality has risen to Victorian levels and is still increasing (Stiglitz, 2012). Alongside this, the environmental crisis continues with little sign of stopping. Meanwhile, there has been a re-emergence of the far-right and with it increased vocal racism and other forms of bigotry. Across the Western world the right are opposing immigration and holding rallies in the USA and Europe in which we can see people confidently carrying swastikas and KKK style torches.

Over this thirty-year period the left has come to adopt a reactive role, responding to right-wing attacks, and rarely offering a hopeful vision of the future. It has been unable to offer alternatives that have salience with the majority of the population. Many so-called left proposals for change seem have effectively become watered-down neo-liberal policies. In some countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Labour parties even ushered in neo-liberal policies in the first place. The radical left, of which this article concerns, is small, and much of it could still be seen as falling into the traps that Bookchin eloquently outlines in his work. However, now may be a ripe time for change.

There seems to be a growing recognition that our economic system does not benefit the majority and that we are in an environment crisis. Since the occupy movement, terms like “the 99%” have entered mainstream discourse. Popular politicians in the USA and the UK, such as Sanders and Corbyn, have generated large support, especially from young people, as they have advocated for a more caring and compassionate politics. In the academic world, there is an increasing body of work on post-capitalism and post-colonialism and the need to discuss and envisage alternatives (Biehl and Bookchin, 1998; Mason, 2016; Taylor, 2017; De Angelis, 2017). Voices on the radical left are recognizing the need to discover, talk about, and advocate a hopeful vision of the future where society does not need to rely on domination and exploitation. A vision which offers an alternative to capitalism and to rightist, nationalist, racist, bigotry.

It is this debate, which I wish to engage with in this paper. What does a revolutionary leftist approach to change look like moving forward? How will it create the societies that it desires? I argue that, following Bookchin's statement that "the organization we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create", that these discussions about invigorating the left - changing it from a small reactive group to a large hopeful, forward-facing alternative - need to take seriously the relationship between means and ends, and need to consider this in relation to the use of violence. My argument is that the logic of means and ends along with the total rejection of domination and exploitation that Bookchin uses, followed to its full conclusion, should lead to the revolutionary left committing to nonviolence, to adopting pacifism. I will argue that violence as a means, due to its very nature, cannot produce the ends desired by all leftists, not just anarchists. On the other hand, I will argue that nonviolence has the potential to produce the ends desired. I will argue that violence is not revolutionary, and its use must be rejected if we want to create a nonviolent society.

While discussions of pacifism maybe laughed away by many on the left, I would say they should be fundamental. Some might say that debates around the use of violence are irrelevant because people are not about to take up arms, and to this, I have three responses. First, even if this is true, the theoretical acceptance of violence still allows for violence in the future. Second, while violence as a strategy does not look likely in the global north right now, there are currently leftist movements around the world using violence. There are various Maoist movements for example, and the anarchist experiment in Rojava, inspired in part by Bookchin's writings, is a militarised movement. Third, there are arguments within the left for, for example, beating up Nazis. The logic used to justify this is effectively the same logic that many militarised movements use.

I will now make my argument to the revolutionary left - that following Bookchin's logic to its full conclusion should lead to the adoption of pacifism by leftists - in the following way. First, I will challenge the historical limits of violence and the nature of violence, under the similar sub-heading to what

Bookchin uses in *Listen, Marxist!, The Historical Limits of Marxism*. Here, I will discuss the limits and nature of revolutionary violence. This is necessary in order to outline exactly what I am refuting. This will lead on to a brief discussion on the inefficacy of past revolutionary violence. From this, I will challenge a series of myths about revolutionary violence, as Bookchin does when he challenges Marxist myths. These are the myths of: violence as necessary and productive, violence as intrinsically valuable, and violence as psychologically liberating. These are common arguments that have been used to justify the use of revolutionary violence, however, they are not universally accepted within the left. I will finish by making my conclusion that violence is not revolutionary and should be rejected in favour of pacifism. The adoption of pacifism is aligned with the nonviolent aims of leftists imagined societies: communal, without oppression, domination or exploitation. This paper should not be read as an attack on leftists or leftism, but on a certain attitude towards revolutionary violence within major strands of leftism.

The Historical Limits of Violence and the Nature of Violence

A violent revolution has always brought forth a dictatorship of some kind or the other... After a revolution, a new privileged class of rulers and exploiters grows up in the course of time to which the people at large is once again subject.

- Jayaprakash Narayan

And I froze, 'cos it was a boy, I would say between the ages of twelve and fourteen. When he turned at me and looked, all of a sudden he turned his whole body and pointed his automatic weapon at me, I just opened up, fired the whole twenty rounds right at the kid, and he just laid there. I dropped my weapon and cried.

- U.S. Special Forces officer and Vietnam veteran

(cited in Grossman, 2009)

I must start this section by stating that I do not claim that all leftists are violent, or that leftism is inherently violent. Quite the opposite, leftists envision a

nonviolent society, a society without domination and exploitation. In this way, leftism is in fact anti-violent, even if leftists have advocated for violence as a method of change. Following this, I do not label Bookchin as violent either. While some leftists may despise pacifism, Bookchin (1979) certainly does not, as this quote from a 1979 interview shows:

I have a great admiration for pacifism... I detest violence. I have a tremendous respect not only for human life but also for the animal life that I have to live with, and I believe that our destiny as human beings is to become nature-conscious as well as self-conscious, living in loving relationship and in balance and in harmony, not only with one another, but with the entire natural world. I have an enormous respect for it and to a great degree tend to follow it personally: pacifist strategies and approaches, and the pacifistic philosophy.²

To reiterate, Bookchin, along with other anarchists, gets close to the theoretical acceptance of pacifism through the recognition that means constitute ends. This acceptance is widely accepted in the anarchist tradition who put it at the core of their belief system. It is ultimate what lead to the split between Bakunin and Marx, as Bakunin expressed that revolutionaries that take control of the state would become like the state, violent and authoritarian (Dolhoff, 1972). The same cannot be said as often for Marxists, Leninists, Trotskyists, and Maoists who much more often have taken a “by any means necessary” approach to change when it comes to revolutionary action. However, they recognise this means ends relationship in other ways. For example, they would never accept that capitalism, however much it is reformed, could create the communist society they desire.

Many Leftists, anarchist and Marxist, now and throughout history, have accepted the legitimacy of revolutionary violence - violence to create radical social transformation – believing it to be necessary or useful. I argue that there are two mechanisms that allow for this position. The first is through the abstraction of revolutionary violence. Here, Leftists do not analyse what the nature of violence,

² In the same interview, Bookchin says why he is not a pacifist. I will quote this in the last section.

or its historical effectiveness, and therefore do not explore nonviolence. The second, which is born out of the first, is through myth making. The creation of myths, which are rarely subject to critical analysis, cover up the horrific nature of violence, and this means that the violence of the past can be looked at with rose-tinted glasses.

Galtung defines violence as, “the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs” which “lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible” (Ho, 2007, cited in Leech, 2012). This can be done *directly*, through physical and psychological actions (Galtung, 1969). Direct violence is an act or event (Galtung, 1977, cited in Galtung, 1990, p294). Leftists reject direct violence in that they would not envisage a post-revolution society that allowed for direct violence. Violence can be committed *structurally*, through social structures (Galtung, 1969, p171). This is violence committed through a process (Galtung, 1977, cited in Galtung, 1990, p294). Leftists reject this kind of violence as they reject capitalism and, immediately (anarchism) or ultimately (Marxism), the state. Violence can also be committed *culturally*, through stories, beliefs, and ways of thinking and speaking that “[make] direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong” (Galtung, 1990, p291). All are interconnected and all do harm to people.³

Revolutionary violence is a form of direct violence. Whether it kills or not, its logic is effectively that of war. This is clear when it comes to armed insurrection, such as a guerrilla war, but it is also true of other tactics where Leftists clash with police or right-wing groups. Scarry (1985, p63-64) states that, “the main purpose and outcome of war is injuring.” Scarry points out that this is both obvious and omitted from most discussions of war. She goes on to write that:

³ Based on this definition of violence, I do not include property damage as violence, unless it actively hinders people’s lives. It is difficult to say that breaking a window does this, for example. It may be inconvenient for the owner of the building, but not really hindering their lives. For example, in the 1999 Seattle protests, a minority of protestors smashed Starbucks windows, but I very much doubt this heavily affected the owners of Starbucks. However, blowing up a hospital, especially in a time of war, would significantly hinder people, and would therefore be violent. Whether property damage is a good tactic is a point of debate, and the answers to this are certainly different in different circumstances, however, having ruled property damage in-and-of-itself as not being a form of violence, I will not discuss it further here.

...one can read many pages of a historic or strategic account of a particular military campaign, or listen to many successive instalments in a newscast narrative of events in a contemporary war, without encountering the acknowledgement that the purpose of the event described is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue, as well as to alter the surface, shape, and deep entirety of the objects that human beings recognize as extensions of themselves.

As I have said, revolutionary violence is direct violence used in order to create radical social transformation. Following on from Scarry's discussion of war, revolutionary violence is therefore about enacting physical injury and therefore destroying, or attempting to destroy, bodies in order to create social change. I am yet to find a leftist argument for violence that deals with this fact. Revolutionary violence embodies domination in its most extreme form, as one inflicts injury on others or kills them. The act of injuring is fundamentally an act of inflicting pain. The winner of the contest of war is the one who can inflict more pain. Scarry (1985, p4) writes that pain is language destroying. Pain is, in its heightened form, inexpressible. It reduces people to a state of cries and moans. Scarry, by pointing out what should be obvious but is often not, shows that direct violence is literally earthshattering, world-destroying.

Going further, revolutionary violence as a strategy is about deleting the other rather than transforming societal relationships. The logic of deleting the other followed to its conclusion is the logic of Pol Pot, not of emancipation. It requires a mental process of making the other less than human in order to justify the act of injury and the infliction of pain. Violence abolishes people's rights entirely. Realising this reality, leftists must ask: Where does an approach like this lead us? What can it build? The answer is that it cannot build anything because violence, whatever it is used for and however it is justified, is purely about destruction. It has no other function. This is true no matter how extreme the violence is. Whether you hit someone or murder them (and if you hit someone you could end up murdering them), the logic is the same: inflicting injury, pain, and destruction on somebody whom you have constructed as less worth of dignity, respect, and life than yourself, your cause or your group.

In this way, violence, in its nature, is the ultimate form of domination. A violent interaction is the polar opposite way of relating that leftists ideally want to foster. In fact, it opposes the types of relationships that leftists want to see fostered in society. As Carter (1978), referring to anarchists puts it, "If anarchists distrust political fictions that justify the denial of actual freedoms, they must distrust more a style of thinking which justifies the most final denial of freedom—death." Many leftists are aware of this point; even Lenin (1968), who writes, "it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence." However, despite flickers of recognition by the likes of Lenin, by and large, the left does not acknowledge the horrific reality of what the violent act is. Once the nature of violence is explored, the key question for all leftists who advocate for revolutionary violence is this: Can you inflict great injury upon someone, and as they lie on the floor, maimed, crying, bleeding, with their guts hanging out, with all of their dignity taken away, can you look at them and feel ok with what you have done? And can you stand there, with this person in front of you, and honestly say that this is how you create the nonviolent, non-dominatory world that you seek? I do not invoke this as an abstract scenario to try and manipulate the argument by making it purely about emotions. I invoke it because, free from abstraction, violence is horrific and if you advocate for it you must realise that.

As I will discuss below, a series of myths about revolutionary violence have helped to cover-up the historic reality of leftist violence. Violence has not been successful for the left as it has failed to create and to defend revolutions. The Russian revolution and the Chinese revolution, the two biggest leftist revolutions in history, resulted in catastrophic violence and authoritarianism. Leftists who defend them give various reasons for this. A common one is that Lenin and Trotsky were betrayed by the Stalinists (Trotsky, 1937). Leftists who are critical of the Russian revolution, namely anarchists, say that the seizure of the state and consequential centralisation of power lead to the revolutions demise. There are likely truths to both of these analysis' as the cause of such events and outcomes are complicated and multifaceted. However, neither critique even considers the

role of violence, of armies taking control of a state, with a method of creating change that rests on the killing and deleting others who they disagree with. The critiques ignore the role this must have had in the civil war that followed, as each group involved – Bolshevik, Menshevik, Makhnovist, some groups also being supported by foreign powers - continued waging war, killing millions. The violence of the Stalinists, who we must remember were part of the Russian revolution, can be seen as a continuation of this. They deleted their challengers, murdering opposition, including the likes of Trotsky.

In China, we see a similar scenario: a centralised, authoritarian army with the same logic of change by deletion. The result is an authoritarian government, that after it has taken power continues to delete its opposition, both internally, killing Chinese who opposed them, but also externally, invading and colonising Tibet and East Turkestan, again killing millions. In both of these cases, where revolutionary violence “succeeds” it creates a violent mess, not a nonviolent society.

Another thing that is missed in leftist’s discussions of revolutionary violence is that violence can never simply be a tool. Organised direct violence requires an apparatus of violence and culture of violence to maintain itself. Tools must be made in factories by skilled workers, the resources for them must be mined, people must be trained to fight, armies must be clothed and fed. In this way, for the tool to be usable it must be integrated in to society. We see this in Russia and we see it in China in the continuation of violence and militarism after leftists gain power. Crucially, as I will discuss below, violence is not the only revolutionary option to create change, but the lack of critique of violence and its past means that these other options are not looked at either.

We can also say that revolutionary violence has been a failure when it has been used for defence. The defence of the Free Territory in Ukraine and of Anarchist Catalonia both failed and again, the reasons are multifaceted. In Catalonia, the Anarchists and Trotskyists were ganged up on by the Fascists, the Stalinists, and an array of foreign powers (Orwell, 1970). Whatever happened though, violence

did not succeed because Catalonia fell. As I will briefly discuss in the last section, there are proposed nonviolent alternatives for defence, but my point here is this: Asking if part of these failures was due to the use of violence is an important undertaking in order to avoid future failure. A key part of the argument I will outline next is that there are more choices than simply violence or passivity.

In looking at these historical events, it is also important to acknowledge that times have changed. These failures of leftist revolutionary violence happened in a time when the war technology possessed by the state was less sophisticated. Similar attempts at violent revolution, as in Russia and China, in the modern day, at least in rich countries would likely get crushed before power could even be taken. This is due to the increased violent capacity of the state. The method of revolutionary violence that did not work and is now more out-dated than ever. Leftist strategy building now must also take this into consideration as leftists look towards the future.

In short, the theories of violence propagated by many revolutionary theorists of the past must be scrutinised. Bookchin warned Marxists in the 70's, in regard to their organisation at the time, "now we are being asked to go back to the 'class line,' the 'strategies,' the 'cadres' and the organisational forms of that distant period in almost blatant disregard of the new issues and possibilities that have emerged." Leftists must not echo this when it comes to the use of violence. They much challenge the myths of violence that many currently uphold and examine the potentials of nonviolent alternatives. Now that I have outlined the nature of violence and questioned its role in major leftist events historically, I will move on to challenge myths that continue to make revolutionary violence acceptable to Leftists. These myths could be seen as demonstrations of cultural violence within leftism that make revolutionary violence "look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong" (Galtung, 1990, p291).

The Myth of Violence as Necessary

*...it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible...
without a violent revolution.*

– Vladimir Lenin

He who desires the end must desire the means. The means for emancipating the working people is revolutionary violence... revolutionary violence takes the form of an organized army.

– Leon Trotsky

The key myth that perpetuates the acceptance of violence amongst leftists is the myth that revolutionary violence is necessary to create change. This argument is easily put into question if other means can be shown to be as effective, or more effective than violence. Over the last century, nonviolent movements have shown this to be the truth.

Over the last decade a lot of research has been produced which backs this claim. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) show that nonviolent movements have been twice as effective at reaching their aims, when compared to violent movements. They make this conclusion by looking at all major violent and nonviolent movements between 1900 and 2006, and find that nonviolence has had a 53% success rate, as opposed to the 26% success rate of violence. These are all movements that aim to overthrow or secede from their rulers. On top of this, Chenoweth and Schock (2015) show that radical (violent) flanks hinder nonviolent movements, but are more successful than primarily violent movements. So, mixed violent and nonviolent campaigns sit in the middle of primarily violent and primarily nonviolent movements in terms of their success rates. This suggests that having a diversity of tactics, as many anarchist activists have argued for, leads to less success than using nonviolence by itself.

Nonviolence also produces more favourable long-term outcomes after its success. After a nonviolent movement, there is far less chance of a war occurring in the ten years following a revolution (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p202). Nonviolence also produces more democratic outcomes, and these last longer (Teorell, 2010; Karatnycky and Ackerman, 2005; Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Bayer, Bethke and Lambach, 2016). If they fail, nonviolent movements are more

likely to create democratic shifts, than successful violent movements are (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p202). This could be because nonviolent movements are less hierarchical and they centralize power less than violent movements, which do the opposite (Schock, 2013, p285; Celstino and Gleditsch, 2013, p391). This is also likely influenced by the fact that the costs that nonviolence imposes are largely reversible. This is opposed to war, which kills and destroys infrastructure, leaving people to deal with death, trauma, a lack of food, a lack of hospitals, roads and homes. This is difficult for post-war societies to recover from.

There is a book by Peter Gelderloos (2007) that seems to get referenced a lot in anarchist circles, where Gelderloos, without referring to the nonviolence literature, claims that nonviolence supports the state. The research on nonviolence outlined suggests that it is nonviolence that is best at undermining the state. It does this by removing pillars of support (Helvey, 2004; Sharp, 1973). Any government is held up by people performing tasks that maintain state power. These could be police, the media, bureaucrats, workers, etc. As a revolutionary group, you have two options for breaking pillars of support. Option one, is to kill people in these pillars, thus removing state power. Option two, is to undermine them using nonviolent techniques of protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and intervention (Sharp, 1973; 2012).

Sharp (1973; 2012) lists 198 methods of how to do this that have been used in the past. Nonviolence is not passive, it is forceful. This should not really be surprising to leftists, because alongside arguments for revolutionary violence, it is the general strike that has traditionally been advocated as an important method of change within leftism. Strikes work because they pull down pillars of support. Power ultimately rests with people, not rulers or bosses.

The necessity argument, optimised in the Lenin and Trotsky quotes above, is nothing more than a blind just war theory. Those advocating just-war theory do not explore nonviolent alternatives (Parkin, 2016). Neither do those advocating for revolutionary violence. They fail to explore nonviolent options and fail look at

the evidence for the effectiveness of nonviolence in comparison to violence. To be fair to many leftist theorists saying violence was necessary, Lenin, Trotsky, Malatesta, Makhno, etc, they were writing before this evidence and before mass revolutionary nonviolence had been used. However, leftists no longer have this excuse.

The Myth of Violence as Intrinsically Valuable

The masses are always ready to sacrifice themselves; and this is what turns them into a brutal and savage horde, capable of performing heroic and apparently impossible exploits, and since they possess little or nothing... they develop a passion for destruction. This negative passion, it is true, is far from being sufficient to attain the heights of the revolutionary cause; but without it, revolution would be impossible.

- Mikhail Bakunin

While the above argument says that violence is legitimate because it is a necessary tool, this argument says that violence *in and of itself* has an intrinsic value. Unlike the necessity of violence argument above, perspectives on the intrinsic “value” of violence are not really about tools for success or failure, but they are connected to it in that success is assumed. Here, I refer mostly to the mythology of the inspirational nature of violence. This involves imagery of revolutionary violence - both physical imagery and mental imagery - which portrays violence in a certain way as to perpetuate it and allow it to be viewed uncritically. I will also outline another connected intrinsic argument, that violence is valuable as it is consciousness increasing.

Heroic revolutionary imagery is found in many leftist traditions, and it exists in different forms. The first, is the image of the dead or dying revolutionary as a revolutionary martyr. This image is often bloodless and portrays dead revolutionaries as glorious rather than dead revolutionaries as a tragedy. Portraying death as glorious, acts to remove the horror of a violent death. It also gives a justification for the horror of the violence committed by the revolutionary or for the death of the revolutionaries themselves. This imagery is needed, both to cope with the injury and pain that has been inflicted and to keep

the movement going if it has been defeated. Creating a story of glory rather than tragedy encourages others to do that same act in the future, without analysing whether violence is useful.

The alternative imagery here, is to view the dead revolutionary as a tragedy. Tragedy, in this context, allows for: first, the acknowledgement of the atrocious nature of violence, and second, for an analysis of that violence. It opens up questions of necessity and effectiveness. It sees dead revolutionaries not as martyrs that spur the movement on, but as the loss of the potentials of the future if death had not occurred. An image of tragedy allows for reflection that has the potential to stop cycles of violence. However, as can be seen in much revolutionary writing, paintings and photographs, it is the glorious martyr that is portrayed. This is seen in images of the defence of the barricades in the Paris Commune, resolute soldiers in the frontline of Mao's revolution, the storming of the gates in 1917, and in revolutionaries rising up in the French revolution, as liberty rises up on the pile of dead oppressors, as in Eugene Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People*.

The second romantic image comes from the uneven odds when leftist revolutionaries challenge oppressors. They are the underdog, David fighting Goliath. This imagery is prevalent in many parts of society, not just in leftism. It could be nonviolent, for example, with the man standing in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square. However, here the image is tied to the violence of the revolutionary, their guns and their uniforms, largely because they come out of violent traditions - of the Bolsheviks, Maoists, the Paris Commune, the French Revolution - rather than mass nonviolent movements.

The third image is the image of the revolutionary who is breaking free from their chains. Violence is viewed as intrinsically valuable by some leftists due to its sometimes-Dionysian nature (Carter, 1978, p339). This spontaneous violence, as favoured by the likes of Bakunin (Friedrich, 1972, p175), differs from the organised revolutionary violence advocated by Lenin and Trotsky, for example. Dionysian violence is about breaking free from the violent shackles of

authoritarianism and domination (Carter, 1978). It is an act where the revolutionary or revolutionaries experience a great moment of freedom. Because of this, violence is again celebrated.

All three of these images – the martyr, the underdog, and the chain-breaker – are not analysed for their effectiveness. This makes them difficult to challenge, as they are not logical arguments. They are based on beliefs, feelings, and attachment to certain revolutionary lineages that hold great meaning in the lives of many leftists. However, as I have suggested above, if nonviolence can be more effective than violence; if nonviolence is more aligned with leftist ideals, and if nonviolence allows for means ends consistency; then the uncritical acceptance of these images hinders leftist aims.

There is another argument about the intrinsic value of violence. This argument, propounded by Sorel, is that violence fosters class-consciousness (Sorel [1908], 1999). It is less based on imagery, but in reality, it probably cannot be separated from imagery of brave revolutionaries fighting together. It is probably true that being violent together creates solidarity within a group using violence, for example in a military unit. This view is echoed by Fanon (2001 [1963], p73), who writes:

But it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. The groups recognize each other and the future nation is already indivisible. The armed struggle mobilizes the people, that is to say, it throws them in one way and in one direction.

However, whether this argument from Sorel translates to a leftist consciousness outside of the military, as Fanon suggests it does for the colonised, is highly suspect. Due to their method, armed groups tend to be isolated from the rest of society through their violence and therefore there are barriers to connecting with the rest of society (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p32-39). Also, less

people join them. Far more people join nonviolent movements which are often more diverse and have less barriers to participation (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p36). More people involved in a movement would suggest a more pervasive increased consciousness in the society of concern. Here, it is participation with others in a movement for change that leads to conscientisation, not the act of violence itself. Action is, as Freire (REF) suggests vital in this. However, killing and injuring others is not.

The Myth of Violence as Psychologically Liberating

Violence is man recreating himself.

The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence.

- Franz Fanon

Fanon shows that oppression and violence involve dehumanisation (2008 [1952]) and that colonisation is a form of violence that is both physical and psychological (2001 [1963]). He does not, however, see revolutionary violence as entirely dehumanising. He proposes violence enacted by the oppressed is a cure, it makes them human again. It removes their sense of inferiority. In this way, it is both an argument of the legitimacy of violence and intrinsic value of violence, and for this reason I am addressing it as a separate point. The oppressed, by using violence, liberated themselves, psychologically.

How Fanon's views on violence should be read is subject to debate. Spivak's view, from her preface of the film *Concerning Violence* (Olsson, 2014) is that Fanon does not endorse violence as such, but instead "insists that the tragedy is that the very poor is reduced to violence, because there is no other response possible to an absolute absence of response and an absolute exercise of legitimised violence from the colonisers". As I have suggested, the history of nonviolence tells a different story. Deming (1984 [1968], p170-188) states that most of Fanon's arguments for violence could be substituted with "radical an uncompromising action", and aggression with self-assertion. This may be true. However, Fanon's theory of violence is certainly not always read this way. If we

read the word violence as violence in Fanon, the argument is that violence liberates.

It is worth noting that many leftists have shared this view, but not key anarchist theorists who only advocate violence on the arguments above. Here, I want to challenge the idea that violence is a liberating act, rather than Fanon personally because, as I have said, he can be read in multiple ways. However, I am mentioning Fanon because he is certainly where this idea is linked to. While this is his position, I do not claim that he is bloodthirsty, and in fact he does recognise means and ends to a certain extent, more than many other proponents of violent revolution (Frazer and Hutchings, 2007). Having said this he does seem to conflate nonviolence with passivity, and only sees resistance as violent.

The view that violence is psychologically liberating, again ignores the nature of violence. Clearly the experience of injury and pain is horrific for the victim of violence, but violence also harms the perpetrator, as Fanon recognises in the case of torturers. Killing is a traumatising experience, as a host of research on soldiers dating back to World War One tells us (Grossman, 2009). Mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, intense guilt, fear, substance abuse, and in the most extreme situations, suicide, often results from participation in organised killing (Hoge, Auchterlonie, and Milliken, 2006; Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting, and Koffman, 2004; Jordan, Schlenger, Hough, Kulka, Weiss, Fairbank, and Marmar, 1991; Prigerson, Maciejewski, and Rosenheck, 2002; Prigerson, Maciejewski, and Rosenheck, 2001; Iowa Persian Gulf Study Group, 1997). Killing is also unnatural in that the majority of people need to be trained to overcome very strong psychological barriers to it (Grossman, 2009). These psychological effects have been recognised for a long time in many cultures. Historically, most cultures had to create rituals, such as washing ceremonies, to help deal with the devastating effects of killing and separate the horror of their actions and what they had seen on the battle field with their normal, mostly nonviolent, day to day lives (Grossman, 2009).

The research on the traumatic effects of killing is not limited to the oppressed fighting oppressors, but to all killing. Does this mean that the oppressed are left with the dilemma of experiencing the violent psychological effects of colonialism, capitalism, and/or the state; or to choose the horror and trauma of killing as the alternative? The answer is no. This links back to Friere's point again: *action* leads to conscientisation. It is clear that resistance can empower people, increase hope and solidarity. Action does this, but violence, the act of physically injuring, does not.

Fanon appears to suffer from a crisis of imagination when it comes to nonviolence, as he appears to be unable to conceive of forceful nonviolent action and sees violence as the only form of agency for the oppressed. This is the opposite of Gandhi (1931 [1909]), who in his seminal text *Hind Swaraj* offers similar insights as Fanon into the nature of colonisation and the colonised mind. However, Gandhi offers nonviolence as the method to overcome the violence of, what he called, modern civilisation (Shah, 2009).

Gandhi, while being shunned by many Leftists, in fact offers a radical anarchistic, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial critique, as well as a method of resistance, and plan for a nonviolent society that fits comfortably with leftist visions of the future. Aside from the importance of his demonstration of mass nonviolent action, Gandhi knew that liberation ultimately comes when one has a peaceful state of mind. Violence, the mind of wanting to harm others, is a mind of distress. It is a continued state of unhappiness, unease. The state of mind of those who experience violence against them is often one of stress, trauma, sadness and despair. This is not and never can be psychological liberation.

Creating a Nonviolent Future

We are not, as Bookchin observed, in the same place as we were when some of the foundational leftist theorists were around. As I mentioned above, to be fair to many of them - Lenin, Goldman, Malatesta, Trotsky, Marx, Bakunin, the list could go on - they had not seen mass nonviolence, or would have only seen it late in

their lives. Revolutionary nonviolence, in this way, is still in its infancy. However, today we can see the effects of nonviolence and must learn lessons from it. Ultimately, leftists must learn lessons from the failures of violence because, as Bart de Ligt (1989 [1937]) proclaims, the history of revolutionary violence and nonviolence suggests that “the more violence, the less revolution.” Leftist pacifist voices must now be taken seriously.

It is important to note, in some conversations about violence and nonviolence, that there is definitely confusion between the terms force, coercion and violence. When Trotsky (1932) said, “...no ruling class has ever voluntarily and peacefully abdicated”, we must be clear that force and coercion are necessary, but violence is not. Force needs to be generated, but this can be done nonviolently. The argument for nonviolence is certainly not for being passive, as virtually every leftist who has argued for violence suggests it is. One can be coercive nonviolently by giving dignity to others, by not injuring, maiming or killing, and by being open to dialogue (May, 2015). However, it is important that this is not always assumed, and dialogue shut down. There are examples where people have given voluntarily. Vinoba Bhave’s Bhoodan (land-gift) movement is a case in point. Vinoba, in a small amount of years, gathered much more land for the landless in India by walking from village to village asking for land to be redistributed than the Maoists have gained in decades of violence.

I must also acknowledge that there are additional arguments for violence, and I have not addressed them because they are not arguments for building the future. However, I will mention them briefly. The first is revenge. This is not a tactical argument, it is about punishment, and it contains no argument for creating a new future. This is true, unless one thinks that killing all of the oppressors in a way that shadows Pol Pot’s genocide is a positive option. If people argue for this violence in the extreme (I very much hope nobody does!), they should not be called leftists as they totally bastardise any ideals of equality or equity and steer closer towards a fascist mentality. If my argument above rejects violence as a tool for revolution it certainly rejects any attempt to kill all of the upper classes, land-owners, royalty, capitalists, or anyone else in a campaign of class-cleansing.

The other argument I have not addressed is violent self-defence, except for noting that it has historically failed, for example in Catalonia. Self-defence, again, is not about building a strategy moving forward, it is about maintenance. However, it is important to note that large and well-equipped armies most often crush small ones. Powerful states are very good at this. Chenoweth (2017) quotes a British military theorist, Basil Liddell Hart, who says that:

“[the Nazis] were experts in violence, and had been trained to deal with opponents who used that method. But other forms of resistance baffled them—and all the more in proportion as the methods were subtle and concealed. It was a relief to them when resistance became violent and when nonviolent forms were mixed with guerrilla action, thus making it easier to combine drastic repressive action against both at the same time.”

While again in its infancy, nonviolence has been used effectively for defence from invading forces, for example in Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia (Sharp, 2005, p515-516). Civilian based defence works in the same way as nonviolent resistance, in that invading armies also have pillars of support. A society trained in nonviolence can undermine these pillars, making occupation impossible (REFs).

Self-defence is Bookchin's (1979) reasons for not becoming a pacifist. He says:

I have a great admiration for pacifism, but I'm not a pacifist, mainly because I would defend myself if I were attacked, and I believe that the American people should defend themselves if any attempt is made to take over the government by coup d'etat, whether by the military or the Marxists or any people who profess to be anarchists. I will not call myself a pacifist for the very simple reason that if something like a Franco should arise in Spain again, or, for that matter, in America, and tried to take away whatever dwindling civil liberties and human rights we retain, I would resist them with a club if I had to. But my admiration for pacifism as an outlook and a sensibility is enormous. I just find that it gets me into contradictions, as it often gets many pacifists into contradictory positions and strategies.

We must ask if this is contradictory to his other statements that I have quoted in this paper. We must ask, especially in the modern day, if violence can be

successful as a defence against well-armed opposition, and if the answer is no, we must ask what the nonviolent alternatives are. I do not deny their bravery, but the anarchists of Catalonia failed in their attempt to defend against Franco. In a similar way, it is questionable if the anarchists of Rojava will go the same way after the Syrian civil war ends, with their policy of violence for defence. They may be left with the Turkish government, the Syrian Government, and others, the United States for example, to contend with; just as the Catalans had to deal with Franco, the Stalinists and Western powers. Powerful governments do not like examples which show that society can be run without elites. Will a military defence against these governments stand up? I know of no modern-day example that would suggest it will. However, nonviolence offers some hope, as it does not play the same game as states. When Bookchin says “I would resist them with a club if I had too”, my reply is, if we are organised, there may be other options, and maybe defence with a club against a gun or a tank is not constructive if it will lead to the death rather than preservation of leftist movements.

Despite the failures and horror of violence, violence is still argued for by leftists, if not for now, then for a potential future. The left as a whole suffers from warism, which, like racism and sexism, is a prejudice, and is a major obstacle to the creation of peace and successful revolution (Cady, 2010). I have argued that the root of the left’s warism lies in a failure to recognise six things: (1) the relationship between means and ends; (2) the horrific nature of violence; (3) that violence is not something to be picked up and put down because it requires a long-term commitment to violence, training, weapons, and a culture of violence; (4) the ineffectiveness of violence and the effectiveness of nonviolent; (5) a grasping to romantic imagery of violence; (6) that violence is traumatic, not liberating, for the perpetrator. The failure to recognise these things, and staying committed to the arguments of long gone leftists who advocated for violence, is incredibly conservative.

Ultimately, my conclusion is that violence is not revolutionary. It ignores and makes excuse to get around the relationship between means and ends; a relationship that Bookchin eloquently argued was essential for the progression

towards the society leftists want to create. As a result, leftist strategy that accepts violence runs the dual risk of creating more violence in many forms and also in choosing an ineffective strategy of change.

Some leftists are closer to realising this than others, and of course there are many who have: Bart de Ligt, Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakesh Narayan, Dorothy Day, Leo Tolstoy, Paul Goodman, Alex Comfort, amongst others. As have many movements: The Sarvodaya movement, Movement for a New Society, various anti-nuclear movements, the civil rights movement, a host of nonviolent revolutionary movements who have overthrown dictators and colonisers around the world. There are others, and while these movements may not be perfect, their learnings and experiences must be explored by leftists with an openness to the positive insights that they may hold.

I will finish by quoting Bookchin's (1971) last line of his *Listen, Marxist!* but I will replace the word Marxist with Leftist. I do this because the root of the problem here, is the same root that Bookchin argues against. Our actions constitute our movements, ourselves, and what we create. If we believe this, if we agree with Bookchin's insight, the Left must reject violence as it looks to the future.

Listen, Leftist: "The organisation we try to build is the kind of society our revolution will create. Either we will shed the past – in ourselves as well as our groups – or there will simply be no future to win."

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