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Sun Tzu Under the Black Flag Part I

By E. M. Spartacus



Throughout human history and especially the modern age, there has been no shortage of revolutionary ideologies to change the zeitgeist. Some which caused waves across vast regions or even the entire earth like Leninism, Liberalism, various forms of Arab Socialism, African Socialism, and Fascism. Others within certain countries like Khomeinism, Labor Zionism, Pancasila, Fenianism, Tridemism, or the various ideologies that popped up in Revolutionary Mexico. One thing that unites these ideologies is that they seek to establish some form of revolutionary state. This process always becomes, whether intentional or not, a war. Sun Tzu mentions the importance of war in statecraft in The Art of War when he writes "The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life or death, a road either to safety or to ruin." Anarchism is the revolutionary ideology that stands out. We as Anarchists are the stateless revolutionary ideology. As we are not seizing state power, our revolution does not involve war per se, yet this does not mean that Sun Tzu is useless for us. On the contrary, we can obviously learn the tactics of our enemies, the state, as all military academies require the reading of Sun Tzu's seminal text, but also to form

tactics of our own, to revise and analyze his work for our purposes. This will be done chapter by chapter, released in multiple issues. We will begin with chapter one.

Chapter One is all about Initial estimates., Sun Tzu says, "The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life or death, a road either to safety or to ruin. It must be thoroughly pondered and analyzed." We already went over this in the introduction, but I will expand on it. When we wage revolution, it is the single most important thing our movement does, so we need to have it down to a tee.

Sun Tzu continues, "Therefore, structure it according to five factors, evaluate it comparatively through estimations, and seek out its true nature. The first is termed the way, the second Heaven, the third Earth, the fourth generals, and the fifth the military laws. The Way causes the people to be fully in accord with the ruler. Thus, they will die with him; they will live with him and not fear danger." The Way would be our ideology. We cannot be fighting for a better world without fully believing in our cause, this is why defeatism or opportunism are the death knell

of any anarchist movement for as soon as we do not believe in what we are fighting for our movement risks being destroyed as we give up easily. In addition, this also means that we must understand our ideology activism is important obviously, no genuine Anarchist would deny this, yet theory is important, we must read all of our relevant theorists, and strive to create theory of our own., How are we supposed to be willing to fight and even die for something if we do not know what it is?

Sun Tzu says furthermore “Heaven encompasses yin and yang, cold and heat, and the constraints of the seasons.” Heaven would mean that we as anarchists would have to be flexible. Our world is ever changing. We need to adapt to pop culture and current issues, as well as different worlds being a global movement. Few people would care if we started out by telling them the points that Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, or Malatesta said in the original way they said them. They want these points that interest them, we need to make as many analogies as we can.

Once again, he writes “Earth encompasses far or near, difficult, or easy, expansive and

confined, fatal, or tenable terrain." Earth would be the physical environments we would need to operate in. Anarchism thrives in urban centers and that is great, but we need to expand our ideology to the countryside, the jungle, the desert, mountains, and all other physical environments as everyone is impacted by their environment. To appeal to working people across the world.

Sun Tzu again writes "The general encompasses wisdom, benevolence, courage, and strictness." As for generals, obviously we are neither an army nor do we have authorities. So, substitute in this one for our behavior. We are better than the state, we must act like it. As anarchists we must avoid at all costs committing atrocities. Only commit violence, when necessary, avoid rape, murder, torture, and all the other ugly things that statist armies commit.

Sun Tzu writes "Military laws encompass organization and regulations, the way of command, and the management of logistics. There are no generals who have not heard of these five. Those who understand them will be victorious; those who do not understand them will not be victorious." The final factor is

military laws which we lack in an official manner, as we are not a military. Yet it is important for us to come to a consensus on our strategy, on our methods, and our plans. The other message we learn in this chapter is as follows: We have the disadvantage in power, but if we play our cards right, we can prevail. We can inspire their men to join our cause, we can make them underestimate us by appearing on the brink of collapse, we can deceive them into making every mistake in the book, making them a mere paper tiger.

Continued in Part II.