

Breaking the Chains

A History of Anarchism

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In the Beginning...

This is a book about the history of anarchism. It is a history of nearly 120 years of unbroken workers struggle. It is a history of sacrifice and bravery by ordinary people fighting for a world without bosses and oppression.

Anarchism – also known as libertarian socialism, syndicalism, or free communism – was not born in the mind of an intellectual or a philosopher. Instead it was born in the struggles of the working and poor people for a world free of oppression and exploitation.

This is how a group of exiled Russian militants expressed this issue:

Anarchism ... (derives) from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality, aspirations which become particularly alive in the best heroic period of the life and struggle of the working masses.

In place of a world based on racism and women's oppression, anarchism stands for a world based on human equality and international unity.

In place of a world based on authority, on taking orders from the rich and powerful, anarchism stands for a world based on grassroots democracy – in the community and in the factory, power must lie with the working and poor people.

In place of a world where the workers create the wealth, but starve in the slums, anarchism stands for a world run by the workers, for the workers – a world without bosses, based on the idea “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need”.

This is what we want: democracy in the factories, food on the tables, and the good things of life for the working and poor masses.

Such a world will not come about through the kind hand of a boss and a politician. It will only come about through mass struggle by the working class to overthrow the bosses and rulers, and to tear down all forms of oppression and exploitation.

To again quote the Russian comrades we mentioned earlier:

The class struggle created by the enslavement of the workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism: the total negation of a social system based on the principles of classes and the State, and its replacement by a free non-statist society under self-management...

This booklet traces the history of anarchism. It looks at the struggles that millions and millions of working people have waged in pursuit of this great ideal. It is not a fancy encyclopedia – it is a book written by ordinary people for ordinary people.

It is in recovering our history, through learning about the long chain of struggles and sacrifices made by earlier comrades, that we can appreciate the greatness of our movement.

It is in learning about our past that we can take heart, to face our future, and never surrender in the face of the evils and injustices of this world of bosses and rulers.

Viva the workers struggle, viva anarchism!

Lucien van der Walt

Johannesburg, 1998

Chapter 1: The First International Workers Association

Anarchism emerged as an organised mass movement in an organisation called the First International Workers Association.

The First International was founded in 1864.

The First International was an international federation of trade unions and workers parties.

The First International was a mass organisation claiming millions of members in many countries.

The main sections were in Europe and North America where the working class was very militant. But there were also sections in South America. There were also contacts in North Africa.

The First International had regular congresses and campaigns. The First International was committed to the workers struggle. It was committed to the unity of workers across the world. All workers have the same interests, and therefore all workers must be united.

The First International was committed to uniting the workers so that they could overthrow capitalism. These were the principles of the First International:

That the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themselves;

That the efforts of the workers must strive to establish the same rights and the same obligations for everyone – that is, political, economic, and social equality;

That the subjection of the worker to capital is the source of all political, moral, and material servitude;

That, for this reason, the economic emancipation of the workers is the great goal to which every political movement should be subordinated;

That the emancipation of the workers is not simply a local or a national problem – but international.

The First international was involved in a number of struggles. These include supporting the fight against slavery in America, and support of the Polish struggle for independence.

But there were deep political differences between comrades in the First International. The comrades differed on the best way to organise the workers to reach socialism.

There were two main factions in the First International.

The “Libertarians” or Anarchists

The first big faction in the First International were called the “libertarians”. They were also called “revolutionary socialists” or “collectivists”. These comrades were the forerunners of anarchism.

The “libertarians” were against the idea that socialism and freedom could come through the government.

The libertarians said “Only the workers can free the workers”. By this, they meant that only mass action from below could really put power in the hands of the working and poor people.

The “libertarians”, said it was an illusion to believe that socialism could be won through elections or through taking over the government (State). The government was the tool of the bosses and rulers. It had always served the ruling class. Therefore it could never overthrow capitalism.

At best, the government would corrupt worker leaders who went to parliament.

At worst, a socialist-controlled government would degenerate into a dictatorship and a police State. In fact, this is exactly what has happened in every country where “socialists” have tried to build socialism from above through the government.

Mikhail Bakunin

The best know figure in the “libertarian” camp was Mikhail Bakunin.

Bakunin was a great man. Some call him the “father” of anarchism.

Bakunin did not “invent” “libertarian” or anarchist ideas. These ideas were invented by the workers and the poor.

But Bakunin helped express and develop these ideas into a clear programme for workers revolution.

Bakunin believed that revolution could only come from below, in mass struggle. For Bakunin, “the homeland of the worker ... is ... the great federation of the workers of the whole world, in the struggle against bourgeois capital”.

The working and poor masses would overthrow the bosses and replace the bosses’ government with a grassroots working class democracy defended by a workers militia.

The working class should take over and manage the land and the factories. The task of the International was “the overthrow of the power of the members of the bourgeoisie [ruling class] ... in a struggle against and over the coalition of all privileged classes and all States”.

Bakunin believed in revolutionary trade unionism.

Bakunin said the trade unions should play a double role.

The unions must organise the masses to fight the daily battle against the bosses. The unions must also organise the workers for the revolution.

The unions should launch a revolutionary general strike in which the workers seize the land and factories. And expel the bosses. The unions would be “the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world”.

The “Authoritarians” or Marxists

The other main faction in the First International were called the “authoritarian socialists” or sometimes the Marxists. They were also known by names such as “Blanquists”.

The “authoritarians” believed that the road to socialism was through taking over the government.

The government could be taken over through peaceful means (such as winning elections). Or it could be taken over by force (perhaps by a small secret group or party).

The “authoritarians” said that the next step towards socialism would be to pass socialist laws. These laws would regulate the factories and land.

The factories and land would be taken over by the government and run by the socialist politicians.

When the socialist laws had been made and enforced, the State would “disappear” and “real” socialism would exist.

Karl Marx

The best known figure in the “authoritarian” camp was Karl Marx.

Karl Marx was an economist whose books exposed capitalism as an exploiting, oppressive system. Marx’s books on economics, such as *Das Kapital*, were brilliant works.

However, there were weaknesses and contradictions in Marx’s political strategies.

In some books, Marx argued that capitalism would automatically collapse. He said this was a “historical law” which could not be altered by any human actions. This meant that socialism was just going to happen, no matter what workers said or did.

In other books, Marx said that socialism could come about through peaceful elections. He meant that workers parties should stand in the elections. When they won the elections, they could make socialist laws and end capitalism.

In one other book, Marx said that socialism should come about through a “revolutionary government”. By this he meant that workers should set up a special workers government instead of the capitalist government. The revolutionary government would be top-down and would make socialist laws. Then one day the “revolutionary government” would disappear and “real” socialism would come about.

Of course, it’s unclear how this model could work. If the government was, as Engels (Marx’s ally) argued “very strong”, then how would it free the workers? But if the government was free, then why should it disappear?

Bakunin warned that such a government would end up in a dictatorship – a prediction that has sadly been borne out by every “revolutionary” government of the twentieth century.

Bakunin versus Marx

It is clear that Bakunin and Marx had very different views on the road to socialism.

Bakunin wanted socialism from below. He believed in mass action and revolutionary trade unionism.

Marx wanted socialism from above. He believed in governmental action and in building political parties.

Bakunin wanted the First International to organise workers around workplace issues and struggles. He wanted to unite all workers for the revolution. He wanted the First International to be open, democratic, and focused on revolutionary trade unionism.

Marx wanted the First International to organise political parties to run in elections. He saw trade unions as less important than elections and political parties. He wanted the First International to be run from above.

The Split in the International

Which faction was more powerful? The “libertarians” (Anarchists) or the authoritarians (Marxists and Blanquists)?

It is clear that the “libertarians” were the biggest faction. By 1872, many of the main branches of the First International were “libertarian” or anarchist. These included the Spanish, Dutch, Italian and French Swiss, Argentinean and Mexican sections. “Libertarian” influence was also strong in southern France and Belgium.

The “authoritarians” had support in Germany, and also in parts of France and England.

It was inevitable that these two factions would clash.

From 1869 Bakunin and Marx came into open conflict.

In 1872, Marx managed to expel Bakunin from the First International.

How could this happen, given that Marx only had minority support in the First International?

Marx was only able to expel Bakunin through the use of the most dishonest and undemocratic actions.

First of all, Marx (who was an administrator in the International’s general council) helped make sure that the 1872 meeting was held in the Netherlands. This meant that Bakunin and many of his supporters could not attend, as they were banned from crossing France or Germany.

Marx “packed” the meeting with delegates from non-existent pro-Marx groups. Marx also used other bureaucratic intrigues to help ensure a majority.

Finally, Marx leveled slanderous and unproven charges against Bakunin and James Gulliam (another key “libertarian”). For years, in fact, Marx had been spreading false rumours about Bakunin.

The fake majority at the Hague Congress then voted to expel Bakunin and Gulliam.

The fake majority also voted to accept Marx’s programme for the International.

All of these decisions were rejected at the next properly constituted meeting of the International at Saint-Imier a few months later. These decisions were rejected by the real majority in the First International.

However, Marx refused to recognise this democratic decision. He said that it was better to destroy the First International than let Bakunin take over.

As a result, the First International split into two organisations.

There were two organisations with the name.

One tiny organisation was led by Marx and collapsed within a year.

One organisation recognised the decisions made at Saint-Imier, and lasted to 1877. It disintegrated due to internal disagreements, as well as the repression and economic crisis in many countries.

After 1877, the “libertarians” or anarchists built a new “Anti-Authoritarian International” with sections in Europe, Egypt, and North and South America.

For the Oppressed, against the Oppressor – *Always!*

The split in the socialist movement that took place in 1872 still exists.

It is a split between those socialists who believe in socialism from above through government (Communist Parties, Labour Parties, Marxists) and those who believe in socialism from below (anarchists, libertarian socialists, council communists).

Since the time of the First International, the anarchists have been focused on the struggle of the working and poor people.

We have been bringing our politics into the daily struggles of the factories, the offices and the communities.

We have built mass organisations and movements at different times and in different countries.

We have been involved in most major modern revolutions We have been there arguing and fighting for the right and necessity of working people running society as opposed to any so-called “socialist party” or bureaucratic or nationalist elite.

We have opposed the reformism of the parliamentary socialists (Labour Parties, Social-Democrats). We have opposed the dictatorships of the so-called revolutionary governments of Russia, China and elsewhere.

Anarchism has historically had a massive impact on the struggles of workers, working peasants and the poor. The red-and-black flag of anarcho-syndicalism has attracted the masses in their millions.

This booklet is about the history of anarchism.

Chapter 2: The Real Origins of May Day

May Day is the day of international working class solidarity. In 1984, workers in South Africa took up a successful campaign to have May Day (also known as Workers Day), recognised as a public holiday. So where does May Day come from?

It is a little known fact that the origins of May Day lie in the struggles of the anarchist movement in the last century.

The IWPA

In the United States of America, the anarchists established an organisation called the First International Working Peoples Association (the IWPA) in the early 1880s.

The IWPA was part of the “Anti-Authoritarian International” set up after 1877 (see previous chapter).

Its founding statement declared:

By force our ancestors liberated themselves from political oppression; by force their children will have to liberate themselves from economic bondage. It is therefore your right, your duty, to arm yourselves

What we would achieve is plainly and simply:

First:- Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, revolutionary and international action;

Second:- Establishment of a free society based on the co-operative organisation of production;

Third:- Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organisations without commerce and profit-mongery;

Fourth:- Establishment of education on a secular, scientific, and equal basis for both sexes;

Fifth:- Equal rights for all without distinction to race and sex;

Sixth:- Regulation of public affairs by free contracts between the autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federative basis.

Signed:- October 16, 1883

The International Congress of Socialists

The IWPA had a big influence amongst the American workers, and was based in the big industrial centres like Chicago.

The IWPA had more than 100 branches.

In Chicago alone, the IWPA published 5 newspapers (1 daily, 3 weeklies, and one fortnightly). IWPA militants and ideas were the leading force in the Central Labour Union: the most militant trade union federation in Chicago. The Central Labour Union aimed to call a revolutionary rising in which the workers would take over the factories and expel the bosses.

The Fight for the 8 Hour Day

In 1886, there was a big movement among the workers to fight for an 8 hour day. Workers across the United States were calling for a general strike on May 1, 1886.

The IWPA and the Central Labour Union helped organise this strike. They did not just talk about revolution. They were with the masses in the daily struggle against Mr Fat cat, against the bosses.

Across the country, at least 340,000 workers, both Black and White, came out on strike on May 1.

In Chicago, 50,000 workers were on strike. 80,000 people attended the march organised by the IWPA and the Central Labour Union.

These demonstrations of workers militancy terrified the bosses and rulers. Like all ruling classes, they were afraid that masses would rise up against their oppressors.

The bosses decided on a plan. They decided to smash the workers' movement through dirty tricks.

Dirty Tricks

On Monday, May 3, there was a fight between strikers and scabs at the McCormick Machine Company. At this company, unionised workers had been locked out for several months. Everyday they arrived at the factory to keep up the fight.

On May 3, the workers tried to stop scabs from taking their jobs. The cops then opened fire on the workers. Many strikers were killed or injured.

This massacre outraged the IWPA and the workers movement. Why were workers being murdered? Just because they were fighting for their jobs?

The anarchist workers newspapers called on workers to arm themselves for self-defence.

On May 4, the IWPA called a mass protest meeting in the Haymarket Square in Chicago. The notice said "Workingmen, Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force" and "Revenge! Workingmen to arms".

The meeting was peaceful. But the speeches were militant. Speakers from the IWPA condemned the oppressive capitalist system and its hired thugs, the police.

As the meeting dispersed, 200 police suddenly attacked the crowd.

At this point an enemy agent threw a bomb towards the police. Some cops were hurt, and one died.

The police then opened fire. The commander, Lieutenant James Bowler, said "Fire and kill as many as you can!". An unknown number of workers were killed and wounded.

The Frame Up

The cops were clearly in the wrong. The meeting was already dispersing when they attacked. The workers did not throw the bomb.

But it seems like workers lives mean nothing.

The blood-crazed cops killed many workers that day.

But it was the workers and their organisations who were blamed for the violence!

There were mass arrests and raids on anarchists and other radicals across the country. Many militants were banned.

The cops arrested 8 leading activists from the IWPA and the Central Labour Union. They said that these comrades were to blame for the bomb at the Haymarket Square.

There was no evidence that the comrades were linked to the bomb. Some were not even in Chicago at the time.

But after a blatantly biased and unfair trial, these comrades were sentenced to death for murder. Isn't this what the capitalist courts are about? Bosses' law and rich man's justice?

This is what the comrade August Spies said as the death sentence was handed out:

If you think you that by hanging us you can stamp out the labour movement – the movement from which the down-trodden millions, the millions who toil and live in want and misery, the wage slaves, expect salvation – if this is your opinion, then hang us!

Here you will tread upon a spark, but here, and there, and behind you, and in front of you, and everywhere, the flames of [of workers struggle] will blaze up ... The ground is on fire upon which you stand.

The Hangings

There were world-wide protests by the workers movement.

But in 1887, four of the comrades were hanged: Albert Parsons, August Spies, Adolph Fischer, George Engel. A fifth militant, Louis Lingg, committed suicide the night before the hanging.

The masses showed their anger and sadness.

200,000 people lined the funeral procession in Chicago.

20,000 crowded into the cemetery.

Years later, the government admitted that the trial was false and the remaining three comrades got amnesty.

Behind the deaths of the Chicago comrades lay the evil will of bosses aiming to disorganise the workers movement.

In Memory of our fallen Fighters

In 1889, the American delegation to an International Socialist Congress in Paris proposed that May 1st be adopted as a workers' holiday.

This was to commemorate working class struggle and the "Martyrdom of the Chicago Eight". This would symbolise the international struggle of the workers for a better life.

Since then Mayday has become a day for international solidarity.

Sadly, though, many socialists do not know that these martyrs of the working people were anarchists.

Chapter 3: Crisis and Rebirth

In the late 1870s and 1880s, anarchism seemed set to grow rapidly.

Anarchism became a mass movement in some countries, such as the United States of America. It also remained a powerful force in countries where it was already strong, such as Spain and parts of South America. And new movements emerged in countries such as Egypt.

The Crisis of the 1880s

But in the 1880s, the movement in fact entered into a crisis. It became weak, and many of its gains were lost.

There were a number of reasons for this decline.

First of all, there was great repression in many countries. For example, in France, literally tens of thousands of workers were killed by the State in 1871. This followed after a failed workers revolution called the “Paris Commune” in which workers took control of Paris and other cities. The repression in France lasted for years.

In the other countries, the bosses were afraid of the rising of the workers. So the bosses’ responded to workers resistance through violence and dirty tricks. This happened in the USA for example (see the previous chapter).

Secondly, there was an economic crisis in many countries at this time. This made it difficult to organise. Workers were afraid of becoming unemployed, and therefore became less militant. Also, in this period, the bosses became less likely to give into workers demands for better wages and conditions. This made many workers less likely to struggle.

Thirdly, the anarchists faced a growing rival in the socialist movement. These were the authoritarian socialists -the socialists who believe in socialism from above through the use of the government.

The “Second International”

Since the collapse of the First International, the authoritarian socialists had been hard at work. They helped set up an organisation called the “Second International” in 1889. The Second International was mainly made up of workers parties that aimed to stand in elections. The Second International also had links to a number of trade unions.

At first, the anarchists joined the Second International, attending the congresses in 1889, 1891 and 1893.

The anarchists said that elections and political parties would not bring freedom. That only mass action and revolutionary trade union struggle would deliver freedom.

But they were expelled in 1891, despite the objections of many delegates.

Motions were passed in 1893 and 1896 to specifically exclude those opposed to the idea that socialism could come through “political action” (socialism through elections).

In 1896, libertarian socialists were explicitly banned from the Second International. But even before the ban, anarchist speakers were physically attacked at the 1896 congress.

Assassinations

So the anarchist movement was being weakened by a number of factors.

There were many disagreements amongst comrades about the best way forward in this situation.

Mistakes were made.

Some comrades became very “pure” and “utopian”. Instead of being involved in mass struggle, they shut themselves away in Ivory Towers.

Other comrades argued that militant armed actions by a few would help spark a workers revolution. They argued that militant actions by a few anarchists would show that the bosses could be defeated.

It was hoped that this would help revive the workers struggle. It was hoped that this would attract the workers to anarchism.

This idea was called “propaganda by the deed”.

“Propaganda by the deed” initially took the form of attempts by small bands of militants to spark rural uprisings. This took place in Italy in 1877 for example.

But “propaganda by the deed” soon came to refer to the assassination of bosses, presidents and kings by lone militants. This took place in Spain, Italy, France, the USA, Austria and elsewhere.

We recognise the bravery of comrades who took this road.

We shed no tears for the fat-cats who got killed.

But we can see that this approach was the wrong one.

The results of “propaganda by the deed” were pitiful.

It brought even more repression on the anarchist movement. The assassinations were used as a pretext for mass arrests and banning.

Instead of awakening the masses, it resulted in lone militants substituting their individual bravery for the mass mobilisation of the working class.

Instead of injuring the ruling class, it had little effect. Individual bosses are easily replaced. The task is to overthrow the whole system that makes bosses possible in the first place.

Instead of attracting the masses to anarchism, it led to less support from the workers. Some workers began to think that anarchists did not believe in mass organising.

These fundamentally flawed tactics are today rejected by the majority of genuine anarchists in favour of mass organising.

The Return to the Trade Unions

By the 1890s, the anarchists were at a dead end.

Many began to question what the great Anarchist revolutionary, Peter Kropotkin, called the “illusion that one can defeat the coalition of exploiters with a few pounds of explosives”.

Instead Kropotkin and many others began to call for revolutionary “monster unions embracing millions of workers”.

They were calling for a return to revolutionary mass struggle.

They were calling for a return to the idea of revolutionary trade unionism. The unions must be the ultimate weapon in the workers revolution. The unions must organise a revolutionary general strike to overthrow the bosses.

This meant that the anarchists should focus their energies on working within the trade unions.

This approach was sometimes called “revolutionary syndicalism”, or “anarcho-syndicalism”. This is French for “revolutionary trade unionism”.

World Wide Growth

The focus on “revolutionary trade unionism” led a to a massive revival of the anarchist movement.

The first big success took place in France. In the late 1890s, anarchism had become the dominant influence on the French trade unions.

There were many successes in other countries.

Between 1890-1945, anarchism was at one point or another the main political influence on the trade unions of many countries.

Latin America

Throughout Latin America, anarchism dominated the working class movement well into the 1930s. The anarchists led most of the trade unions in Latin America.

Anarchism was especially powerful in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay. The movement was also strong in Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela and elsewhere.

Europe and North America

The anarchists also led the trade unions in European countries such as France, Portugal and Spain.

There were also big anarchist minority factions in Britain, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the USA. The Italian “minority” faction had more than 800, 000 members in 1920.

Asia

In Asia, anarchism grew from the early 1900s.

Kotoku Shusui helped found the movement in Japan in about 1906. It was very strong in the trade unions, and active in the struggle against imperialism and fascism. The comrades faced waves of repression, notably in 1911, 1923, and 1935-6.

In China, the movement emerged in 1906, and the first groups were organised in 1911. The Chinese anarchists were the main force in the social revolutionary movement. In fact, they were so strong that in 1919, there were still no Marxist organisations. Key militants included He Zhen, Li Shizeng, Li Feigan (Bajin), Liu Sifu (Shifu), Shen Zhonjiu and Ou Shengbai.

The anarchists built the first trade unions in China, and also launched the first workers newspaper in China. By 1921, they led at least forty trade unions in Guangzhou region, and also spearheaded the union movement in Hunan and to a lesser extent Shanghai.

In addition, anarchists were active in the establishment of workers' schools and clubs to educate worker organisers. In 1927, anarchists inspired the formation of the Labour University in Shanghai, aiming to use it to train worker militants who could act independently of political parties. The Chinese anarchists also pioneered efforts to organise the peasantry, and were the first Chinese revolutionaries to speak of the "rural revolution".

In Korea, the anarchists were a powerful force that emerged in the late 1910s. In 1928, the Korean Anarchist Federation organised an Eastern Anarchist Federation in 1928 with affiliates in China, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and other countries. They were very active in the struggle against colonialism (Korea was a Japanese colony). We will look at their story in a later chapter.

Africa

An Egyptian section of the "Anti-Authoritarian International" was established in the 1880s, and anarchist comrades were active in Egypt until at least the 1910s.

Comrades were active in Algeria from at least the 1890s, and included militants such as Sail Mohamed of the Algerian Anarchists Group. The revolutionary trade union, the CGT-SR, was active in Algeria. Sail Mohamed edited the North African edition of the anarchist journal *Terre Libre* in the 1930s.

Anarchists and syndicalists helped found the socialist movement in South Africa, and were very influential in groups such as the International Socialist League and the Industrial Socialist League.

Revolutionary syndicalists from the International Socialist League built the first Black trade union in South Africa. This was called the Industrial Workers of Africa and was set up in 1917 in Johannesburg. The Industrial Workers of Africa told the workers to organise mass strikes against the pass laws and cheap labour system.

The comrades also built other such trade unions in Durban and Cape Town.

The massive Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) which was active in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe in the 1920s was influenced by anarchist goals. Its constitution was based on that of the IWW, the revolutionary syndicalist union in the USA. But the ICU was hijacked and split by middle class Black liberals and opportunists.

The Left-Wing Alternative

By the early 1900s, anarchism was the most more popular form of revolutionary socialism in the world.

Our ideas dominated the revolutionary left across the world.

Even some of those who called themselves "Marxists" adopted anarchist ideas, renaming them things like "Socialist Industrial Unionism".

It is important to note that the anarchists did not only work in the trade unions.

It is also important to note that the anarchists did not only look at issues like wages and safety, although these issues are important.

The anarchists also took up community struggles like rent strikes, and struggles on the land. The anarchists fought against war, against racism, against imperialism, and against women's oppression.

Chapter 4: Declaring War on Racism

From the start, the anarchists opposed racism.

The anarchists opposed the basic ideas of racism which claimed that some humans were worth less than other people. Instead, they affirmed that all people were equal, that all people had the same abilities and the same great potential.

The anarchists opposed racism because they believed in the unity of all workers and working peasants in all countries. The poison of racism was used to divide workers and break their struggles.

The anarchists opposed racism because it was unjust and evil. Because it led to the oppression and persecution of millions of people. Racism was wrong because racism was oppression of human beings.

The real way to end racism was not to set up new governments or to appeal to organisations like the United Nations.

Racism could only be ended for once and for all through workers struggle and workers revolution.

Only the revolution would bury racism for once and for all.

But in the meantime, all racism and racial hatred had to be fought – mercilessly.

Bakunin

The theorist-activist founders of Anarchism/Syndicalism were anti-racist revolutionaries.

Mikhail Bakunin was a lifelong opponent of national oppression and racism.

Bakunin stated that there must be a “recognition of human rights and dignity in every man, of whatever race or colour.”

For Bakunin, the task was to fight for “the triumph of equality ... political, economic, and social equality, through the abolition of all possible privileges ... for all persons on earth, without regard to colour, nationality, or sex”

He was not alone.

Albert Parsons of the International Working Peoples’ Association (IWPA) (see chapter two), was involved in the anti-slavery movement in the United States in the 1870s. He was denounced by racist right wing newspapers of the time as a “violent agitator, affiliated with the worst class of negroes” and “ever ready to stir them up to strife”.

“Our motto”, said an IWPA speaker at a mass rally in Chicago, “is liberty, equality, and fraternity. We do not believe in robbing or abusing a man because he is coloured, or a Chinaman, or born in this country or that. Our international movement is to unite all countries for the mutual good of all, and to do away with the robber class”.

Elisee’ Reclus and Rudolph Rocker were among the many others who fought the evil of racism, demolishing racist theories and campaigned against racist lies.

Their writings are filled with anger and denouncement of racism.

The movement as a whole placed the fight against racism at the centre of their struggles, as is shown by the following cases from Cuba, the USA, Mexico and the Ukraine.

Cuba

The anarchists won over the Cuban labour movement from mid-1880s onwards.

They led massive strikes and were active in the anti-colonial struggle against Spain (see Chapter 6).

The anarchists united people of African, European and mixed-descent in mass trade unions. They united the workers in the struggle against the bosses and against all oppression.

The anarchists led struggles against the legacy of slavery in Cuba. This included racial discrimination and the physical punishment of apprentices.

America

The Anarchists/Syndicalists were in the forefront of the fight against racism in the USA.

For example, the IWPA, which we looked at Chapter 2, had as one of the central points of its founding programme “equality for all, regardless of race or sex”.

It is significant that its key activists, such as Albert Parsons, had been active in the anti-slavery movement before joining the anarchists.

The IWPA organised amongst all workers. It regularly and pitilessly attacked racism.

One of the main IWPA activists was Lucy Parsons, a powerful Black woman and an ex-slave from Texas. She was always hounded by the racist forces of “law and order”, but never surrendered in her struggle for the rights of the workers.

In 1905, Lucy Parsons was one of those who founded the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

The IWW was a radical trade union that became fully Anarcho-Syndicalist in 1908.

At the time, the mainstream trade unions in America did not allow Blacks, Chinese, women and foreign-born workers to join.

The IWW was different. It organised all workers including African-Americans, European immigrants, Chinese and Mexicans.

The IWW combated racist barbarism like lynching, segregation, and unequal wages.

It recruited tens of thousands of Africans and Native Americans, particularly in the timber industry and the docks, including in the Southern States of the USA. It organised oppressed Hispanic workers in the South West and the East Coast.

The IWW stood for justice and for workers solidarity across racial and ethnic lines. According to one historian, the IWW “united Black and White workers as never before in American history and maintained solidarity and equality regardless of race or colour such as most labour organisations have yet to equal”.

Many of its activists were people of colour, like R.T. Sims and Ben Fletcher (who were African-Americans), and Frank Little (of Native American descent).

This is why the African-American leader W.E.B. du Bois stated that “We respect the Industrial Workers of the World as one of the social and political movements in modern times that draws no colour line”.

Unfortunately, like the IWPA before it, the IWW fell victim to repression in 1917-21, with mass arrests, attacks on union offices, and vigilante violence and lynchings. Comrade Frank Little was lynched by a mob. Nearly 200 key activists were charged with treason from 1918 onwards, and jailed or deported.

The IWW also organised sections in Australia, South Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America. All were anti-racist.

The Australian IWW was, according to one historian, the first anti-racist workers movement in that country.

South Africa

In South Africa, the Industrial Workers of Africa – the first Black trade union – was founded on the model of the IWW, and called for mass resistance by Black workers against racism and capitalism.

The syndicalists of the International Socialist League, which founded the Industrial Workers of Africa, stated in a famous quote in 1915:

an internationalism which does not concede the fullest rights which the native working class is capable of claiming will be a sham... If the League deal resolutely in consonance with Socialist principles with the native question, it will succeed in shaking South African capitalism to its foundations. Then and not till then will we be able to talk about the South African Proletariat in our international relations. Not until we free the native can we hope to free the white.

The French and Algerian anarchist movement opposed the hundredth anniversary celebrations of the conquest of the country by the French bosses, held in 1930. A joint statement of the CGT-SR, the Anarchist Union and the Association of Anarchist Federations issued joint statement charging: “*Civilisation? Progress? We say: murder!*”.

Mexico

In Mexico, the anarchists were fighters against racism and imperialism.

Between the 1870s and 1890s, comrades such as Chavaz Lopez helped organise revolts for land by Native American peasants.

In the 1900s, the Anarchist-led PLM (Mexican Liberal Party) fought against American imperialism and racism against Mexican and Hispanic workers.

The same was true for the Mexican section of the IWW and for other mass anarchist trade unions such as the Casa del Obrero Mundial (“House of the Workers of the World”) in the 1910s.

This was both before, during and after the Mexican Revolution (1910-22). The anarchists played an important part in this revolution as well, as activists, as fighters, and as allies of the peasant revolutionary Emiliano Zapata.

Ukraine

In its early stages, the Russian Revolution was a genuine worker-peasant rising.

This was especially true of the Ukraine, the second biggest country in the Russian Empire. Here the anarchists (called the “Makhnovischna”) were at the forefront of the fight for workers and peasants freedom. They fought the bosses, the German imperialists and other counter-revolutionaries.

Between 1918 and 1921 they organised a mass revolutionary peasant-worker movement which smashed the German occupation, redistributed the land, and set up anti-authoritarian peasant communes and workers councils. The region was defended by the democratic Revolutionary Insurgent Army.

The Makhnovist movement struggled tirelessly against anti-Jewish racism in the area. Extensive propaganda work was done.

From the start, the movement included poor peasants of all nationalities, including Ukrainians, Greeks, and Jews.

Guns and ammunition were given to Jewish communities for self-defence against attack. Any Makhnovist who took part in racist acts against Jews were promptly and severely punished.

As a Makhnovist document stated:

Your revolutionary duty is to stifle all nationalist persecution by dealing ruthlessly with the instigators of anti-Semitic pogroms [racist attacks]...

The path towards the emancipation of the workers can be reached only by the union of all the workers of the world.

Long live the workers' international!

Long live the free and stateless anarchist commune!

Chapter 5: Anarchists in Anti-Imperialist Struggles

Anarchists/Syndicalists also played an important role in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles across the world.

Again, anarchism is by its very nature opposed to colonialism and oppression.

Anarchism is based on a fundamental belief in human equality and dignity. It is opposed to oppression of whatever sort. It is opposed to the repression of the State, that “gigantic graveyard” of humanity (Bakunin). It is opposed to the exploitation of capitalism.

This opposition to oppression, the centralised State, and capitalism, has inevitably led anarchists to directly oppose imperialism.

But the anarchists did not advocate “nationalism”. Nationalism is the ideology that all classes in the oppressed “nation” (including bosses and workers) should unite to smash/replace imperialism with an “independent State”.

By contrast the anarchists argued that workers must not ally with the bosses. They also argued that no State – no matter how independent – could deliver freedom. The State by its very nature was a tool of elites – local and international.

Independence could only come through a workers revolution.

Bakunin

Mikhail Bakunin entered politics partly as an activist in East European anti-colonial struggles. As a result he was imprisoned and internally exiled within Russia. After escaping in 1861, he abandoned nationalism for anarchism but maintained his anti-imperialism.

For Bakunin anti-colonial revolt was inevitable and desirable.

Bakunin doubted whether what he termed “imperialist Europe” could keep the subject peoples in bondage: “Two-thirds of humanity, 800 million Asiatics asleep in their servitude will necessarily awaken and begin to move. But in what direction and to what end?”

Bakunin declared “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression”, stating that every people “has the right to be itself... no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its languages and its laws.”

However, national liberation ought to be achieved “as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses”. If the anti-colonial struggle is hijacked to “set up a powerful State” or if “it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class” it will become a “retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement”.

Consequently, the independence movement requires that “all faith in any divine or human authority must be eradicated among the masses” and that the struggle against colonialism become an internationalist social revolution against the State and the class system

Cuba

The anarchist movement took up the challenge.

In Cuba, the anarchists had a massive working class base, and had political leadership in the trade unions.

They were also active in the struggle for independence from Spain. They were active in the Ten Year War (1868-78) and later aided the famous anti-colonial fighter, Jose Marti, after he assured them that independence would bring social reforms for workers.

But the anarchist's politics remained those of social revolution, not nationalism.

When the final War of Independence exploded in 1895 anarchists in Cuba and in exile were in the forefront of this struggle. For example, comrade Armando Andre was a commander in the rebel army.

Although the war ended with Spain's defeat in 1898, Marti's promised reforms died with him in battle in 1895.

Mass struggle thus continued under the independent Cuban government. The new government did not meet the workers' demands.

The local elite had hijacked the anti-colonial struggle. It repressed the workers and anarchists who had sacrificed themselves for independence.

This clearly bears out Bakunin's warning: only the working people can make the revolution against imperialism.

Nicaragua

In 1909 the USA occupied Nicaragua.

This led to a number of failed bourgeois-led revolts. These revolts were led by rich men, who wanted independence but not socialism: libertarian or otherwise.

The last of capitalist-led anti-colonial revolts ended in 1926. There were negotiations, and the liberal leader, Moncada, became president of what was in practice a "semi-colony" of the USA.

This settlement was opposed by Augustino Sandino. Sandino had been involved in organising the revolt that ended in 1926. He was a worker, and also an anarchist.

Sandino launched a seven-year peasant guerrilla war against the US occupation in 1927.

Despite several political weaknesses, Sandino's movement, the ESDNN, moved steadily leftwards.

Sandino realised that in the struggle against imperialism "only the workers and the peasants will go all the way to the end".

The ESDNN placed increasing emphasis on organising peasant collectives in the liberated territories.

After years of battle, the US forces were withdrawn in 1933. Following this, the ESDNN was largely demobilised, although the peasant collectives continued to function.

Sadly, Sandino was assassinated in 1934. The peasant collectives were also destroyed. The man behind this counter-revolution was a General Somoza, who was conservative, and in fact pro-imperialist ruler of the State.

But while Somoza's name lives on in infamy, Sandino is remembered today as a Nicaraguan national hero.

Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe has long been dominated by various imperialist forces: Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman.

Anarchists were active in the 1873 uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Austro-Hungarian imperialism.

They also took part in the “National Revolutionary Movement” in Macedonia (against the Ottoman empire). At least 60 gave their lives in this struggle, particularly in the great 1903 revolt.

In the 1903 revolt the anarchists made an attempt to extend the struggle in a revolutionary direction. To move the struggle beyond just “flag independence” (a change of bosses) but towards the social revolution of the working and poor people.

Another example from East Europe is the struggle in the Ukraine, which is discussed in Chapters 4 and 7.

Ireland

In Ireland, James Connolly is remembered as a martyr of the 1916 Easter Rebellion against British imperialism. Connolly was executed after the rising was defeated.

Connolly was fundamentally a revolutionary Syndicalist who believed in class struggle and in building revolutionary trade unions to smash capitalism.

This is true despite some political errors. For example, Connolly believed that the nationalists could become revolutionary and that is why he joined the nationalist-led Easter Rising.

Asia

Anarchists played a key part in the Korean struggle against Japanese imperialism.

They were active in the 1919 Korean uprising, and in 1924 formed the Korean Anarchist Federation (KAF) on a militant anti-imperialist platform that argued for international social revolution.

In 1928 the KAF organised an Eastern Anarchist Federation in 1928 with affiliates in China, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and other countries.

Inside Korea, the Anarchists organised a country-wide underground network that engaged in guerrilla activity, propaganda work and trade union organising.

In 1929, the Anarchists established a two million-strong armed revolutionary zone in Manchuria. The zone was based on free peasant collectives, and defended by a peasant army.

This zone was defeated some years later by Japanese imperialism and other forces.

Still, resistance continued throughout the 1930s and joint Chinese-Korean anarcho-syndicalist military operations were organised after Japan’s 1937 invasion of China.

Anarchists were also active after Korean independence in 1946. This was despite repressive governments and internal divisions amongst the comrades.

In the Belly of the Beast

Finally, we should point out that anarcho-syndicalists in the imperialist countries also supported the anti-imperialist struggle.

For example, the prominent Japanese Anarchist Kotoku Shusi was framed and executed in 1910 – partly because his *Commoners' Newspaper* campaigned against Japanese imperialism in Asia. The Japanese comrades were fiercely opposed to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

In 1909, the Spanish Anarchists organised a mass strike against intervention in Morocco.

In Italy, the movement opposed Italian expansionism into Eritrea and Ethiopia in the 1880s and 1890s, and organised a massive anti-war movement and general strike against the 1911 invasion of Libya and the post-war intervention in Albania.

In France, the CGT organised protests and demonstrations on the issue of the Morocco crisis in 1905. In the 1920s, the CGT-SR organised in Morocco, and as we saw above, condemned French colonialism.

Chapter 6: Fighting Women's Oppression

The anarchist movement fought against women's oppression. And many prominent figures in the women's movement were anarchists.

Bakunin

"In the eyes of the law", Bakunin noted, "even the best educated, talented, intelligent woman is inferior to even the most ignorant man". Women are not given equal opportunities with men.

For the poor under-privileged women, said Bakunin, there is the threat of "hunger and cold", and the threat of sexual assault and prostitution.

Even within the family, women are too often the "slaves of their husbands", and their children are "deprived of a decent education, condemned to a brutish life of servitude and degradation".

Instead of this, "equal rights must belong to both men and women" (Bakunin). Women must be economically independent, "free to forge their own way of life".

This requires united workers struggle against the bosses. As Bakunin put it:

Oppressed women! Your cause is indissolubly tied to the common cause of all the exploited workers – men and women!

Parasites [bosses] of both sexes! You are doomed to disappear!

And many activists in the women's rights movement were Anarchists/Syndicalists.

Thus, Louis Lingg, one of the comrades sentenced to death in Chicago in the 1880s (see chapter 2) stated that :

A woman has a right to all positions which she can administer, and in a free (anarchistic) society she will know how to exercise the right, too. She will no be no longer the mere servant, the cook maid of her spouse, but the equal of him.

Similarly, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, of the IWW argued for women's rights – for working class women to unite with men against oppression, capitalism and the bosses' government.

Lucy Parsons

Lucy Parsons, the Black woman anarchist fought for the rights of workers, Blacks and women (see chapter 2 and 4).

In her speech to the founding conference of the IWW in 1905 Lucy Parsons paid close attention to the oppression of working class women.

Lucy Parsons noted how that oppression was used by the bosses to reduce the wages of the entire working class:

We, the women of this country, have no ballot even if we wished to use it... but we have our labour... Whenever wages are to be reduced, the capitalist class uses women to reduce them.

At a time when the left tended to ignore the plight of prostitutes, Lucy Parsons told the conference that she also spoke for “my sisters whom I can see in the night when I go out in Chicago”.

Emma Goldman

Emma Goldman was another US militant. She was born in a Jewish ghetto in Russia. She emigrated to the USA in the 1880s, where she was radicalised by the hanging of comrades in Chicago (see chapter 2).

Working in the factories as a seamstress, she became a militant agitator and speaker.

She was repeatedly imprisoned: for calling on the unemployed to organise to demand bread; for distributing information on birth-control; and for organising against World War One.

She was deported to Russia in 1919 and was active in both the Russian (1917-21) and Spanish Revolutions (1936-7).

Emma Goldman believed in revolutionary trade unionism.

Emma Goldman stood for the rights of women.

She rejected male domination in the family and called for equality between men and women.

She opposed capitalism which reduces women to cheap labour and sex objects.

She criticised the middle-class reformist feminists of her time. She argued that they were detached from the economic realities of working class women.

Emma Goldman and her comrade, Alexander Berkman, also championed the rights of gay and lesbian people.

Argentina

In Argentina, the women anarchists who set up *La Voz De La Mujer* (“The Voice of the Woman”) in the 1890s were the first to link women’s liberation with revolutionary working class ideas in the whole of Latin America.

These comrades called on women to mobilise against their oppression as both women and workers.

He Zhen and China

In China, the movement developed a distinct anarchist position on women’s liberation.

The comrades argued that women’s oppression was linked to the class system, economic exploitation and backward cultural practices.

In contrast to the nationalists, who wanted women’s liberation only as a way of building the nation, comrades like He Zhen argued for class struggle and the right of women to determine their own lives.

In Spain, too, to take another example, the anarchist movement took up women’s freedom (see chapter 9).

Chapter 7: War and Revolution 1916-22

Almost the entire anarchist movement opposed the imperialist First World War, suffering banning, detentions and deportations.

In the USA, the repression of the IWW was closely linked to its opposition to the war effort.

In Australia, the IWW was banned because of its anti-war activities, and 12 key activists were jailed for “treason”.

In Germany, the printing presses of the Free Workers Union (an anarcho-syndicalist trade union) were impounded by the government to prevent opposition.

In Spain, the National Confederation of Labour (CNT), a giant anarcho-syndicalist trade union hosted an anti-militarist conference during the war.

These are just some examples of anarchism’s opposition to the war.

By contrast, almost every party of the authoritarian “Second International” (with the exception of the Bolsheviks in Russia, and the Socialist Party of Italy) voted to support World War One. They told their members to kill their brother workers from other countries in an imperialist war.

Four Years that shook the World

Towards the end of World War One, the world was shaken by a revolutionary upheaval between 1916-22.

The revolt took place across both the West and the Third World. The world stood on the brink of global revolution.

The anarchists were central to the rising.

The anarchists were active in colonial revolts in countries such as Ireland and Korea (see chapter 5).

The anarchists launched general strikes that escalated into revolutionary confrontations in countries such as Mexico (1916), Spain (1917), Portugal (1918), and Argentina (1918-9).

The anarchists in Italy were central to the 1920 factory occupation movement in which 600,000 workers seized and managed the factories.

The anarchists were important actors in the revolutionary workers councils established across Europe. In Germany, for example, comrades such as Gustav Landauer and Erich Muesham were on the committee of the Bavarian Soviet.

The Counter-Revolution

It is a tragedy that these revolts did not succeed. If the workers had won, we would be living in a world of freedom today.

But for a variety of complex reasons the revolutionary upheaval failed.

The comrades made mistakes.

The comrades were also brutally repressed. In Germany, Gustav Landauer was beaten to death by soldiers. According to an eyewitness “They dragged him into the prison courtyard. An officer struck him in the face. The men shouted ‘Dirty Bolshie! Let’s finish him off!’ A rain of blows from rifle butts descended on him. They trampled on him till he was dead”.

The repression is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which looks at fascism’s role in the counter-revolution.

The Russian Revolution, 1917-21

In only one country did the revolution seem to succeed: Russia.

The Russian Revolution was one of the greatest workers’ uprisings in history.

The Russian Revolution was not a sudden event that took place on October 15, 1917.

Rolling Mass Action

The Russian Revolution took place throughout 1917.

Across the country workers and peasants set up action committees and “Soviets” (councils of elected delegates from workplaces, army units and neighbourhoods).

The peasants seized the land from the landlords and began to farm it for themselves.

In the cities, factory committees began to appear. The factory committees were based in workplaces and elected by mass assemblies of the workers.

At first the factory committees struggled to limit the control of the bosses and took up issues such as the eight hour day, which was won in many cases.

The bosses reacted viciously and between March and April 586 enterprises were closed with 100,000 workers locked out.

The factory committees also helped organise the workers in struggle for better wages.

Over time, the factory committees became increasingly radical. They began to talk of taking over the factories and placing them under workers’ control.

In many cases management was only rubber stamping decisions taken by the committees and was answerable to workers’ mass meetings.

According to one observer in 1918:

An anarchist wave in the shape of factory committees and workers control was sweeping over the Russian Labour movement.

The factory committees resolved to unite with each other and run the economy under workers control. The Resolution of Factory/Shop Commissions in 1917 stated:

The economic life of the country – agriculture, industry, commerce and transport must be subject to one unified plan, constructed so as to satisfy the individual and social requirements of the wide masses of the people.

Even the soldiers and sailors began to organise themselves into Soviets.

In the middle of 1917, the bosses tried to seize Petrograd (the main city) by force. They wanted to crush the workers movement. Armed workers and rebel soldiers and sailors defeated the attempted take-over.

Revolution was in the air.

Workers' Politics

There were different political factions amongst the workers.

One of the main factions was called the "Mensheviks". The Mensheviks said that the workers should not establish socialism. Instead, the workers should elect Menshevik leaders to parliament to make reforms in capitalism. They were reformist socialists.

The anarchists were a second, smaller faction. There were at least 10,000 active Anarchists in Russia itself. There was also a mass movement in the Ukraine led by Nestor Makhno (see below, and also see Chapter **).

The anarchists were very involved in the factory committees. They had a lot of support with the miners, dockers, postal workers, and bakers. They believed that the peasant Soviets and the factory committees should take over the country. In this way, the working people could be in charge and the bosses and the government would be overthrown.

In the *Workers Truth* newspaper in August 1917, anarchists wrote:

We say to the Russian workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionists: above all continue the revolution.

Continue to organise yourselves solidly and unite your new organisations: your communes, your committees, your soviets.

Continue, with firmness and perseverance, always and everywhere to participate more extensively and more and more effectively in the economic life of the country, continue to take into your hands, that is into the hands of your organisations, all the raw materials and all the instruments indispensable to your labour.

Continue the revolution. Do not hesitate to face the solution of the burning questions of the present. Create everywhere the necessary organisations to achieve these solutions. Peasants, take the land and put it at the disposal of your committees.

Workers, proceed to put in the hands of and at the disposal of your own social organisations – everywhere on the spot – the mines and the subsoil, the enterprises and the establishments of all sorts, the works and the factories, the workshops and the machines.

The Bolsheviks

Another big faction among the workers was called the "Bolsheviks" or Communist Party. This faction was led by Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. They followed the ideas of Marx, and had been part of the authoritarian Second International (see chapter 3).

Like the anarchists, the Bolsheviks believed in a revolution. But the Bolsheviks believed that the revolution should come through a "very strong government" (Engels) led by an elite revolutionary party.

In other words, the Bolsheviks believed that socialism should come from above, and be run by a centralised regime.

Trotsky said that “socialism” meant “authoritarian leadership... centralised distribution of the labour force... the workers’ State (considering itself) entitled to send any worker wherever his labour may be needed” (from *Terrorism and Communism*).

He said workers must be placed under military discipline:

the working class... must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded just like soldiers. Deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps.

Criticising those who opposed the idea of a revolutionary dictatorship, Trotsky said:

They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy!

Lenin argued that “the irrefutable experience of history has shown that the dictatorship of individual persons was very often the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes”.

For Lenin, socialism was not based on workers power. Instead, “our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort in copying it and not shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it”.

Lenin opposed worker control of factories, saying that there must be government appointed managers and “unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during work time”. Rather than direct democracy, there must be “iron discipline, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader.”

The Bolsheviks seize Power

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks and the anarchists organised a rising against the Russian government. The rising was co-ordinated by a Military Revolutionary Committee, which included at least 4 anarchists.

The anarchists supported the rising because they wanted the capitalist Russian government to be overthrown. They wanted power to reside only with the Soviets and factory committees.

The Bolsheviks supported the rising because they wanted to replace the Russian government with their own “revolutionary government” called the “dictatorship of the proletariat”.

Because they believed in revolution from above, the Bolsheviks soon moved to destroy the power of the Soviets and factory committees. The Bolsheviks also abolished political freedom, and repressed the other socialist factions such as the anarchists.

The State and Counter-Revolution

The Bolsheviks took away the power of the factory committees and replaced workers control with government managers.

First the factory committees were put under trade union control, and then the trade unions were taken over by the government.

In 1919, about 90% of enterprises were run by workers. But in 1920, nearly 80% of factories were under the control of old-style managers.

The Bolsheviks removed the right of ordinary soldiers to elect their officers in the army. Nearly 50,000 officers from the old regime were drafted into the new army as commanders.

The Bolsheviks replaced the power of the Soviets with the power of the State. All the Soviets were put under the control of the Cabinet (called the "Sovnarkom").

The new "revolutionary" Bolshevik government was not based on workers councils. In late 1918 only about 10% of the senior officials of key government ministries were Bolsheviks. Instead, they were bureaucrats from the old regime. The new government, instead, took over the workers' councils, and made them into rubber-stamping structures.

The tiny Bolshevik party soon became a party of bureaucrats. By 1923, two thirds of its members occupied administrative posts and only one in seven was a manual worker.

By early 1918, the power of the Soviets and the factory committees had been entirely destroyed.

Dictatorship *OVER* the Proletariat

The Bolsheviks repressed all opposition forces, including other socialists.

In April 1918 40 anarchists were killed or wounded and around 500 put in prison in a series of Bolshevik attacks in Moscow and Petrograd.

All the major anarchist publications were banned in May 1918. Even anarchist papers, which supported the Bolsheviks, were banned.

Over the next four years, hundreds then thousands of anarchists were to be arrested, jailed, tortured, exiled and executed.

Other pro-revolution left parties suffered a similar faith and by 1919 so did workers who acted independently against the regime.

The repression was organised by the secret police or "Cheka". The head of the Cheka said:

We stand for organised terror – this should be openly stated – terror being absolutely indispensable in current revolutionary conditions... we terrorise the enemies of the Soviet government in order to stifle crime at its inception. Terror serves as a ready deterrent.

By 1921, the Cheka had 260,000 members, making it nearly 20 times bigger than the secret police of the Tsarist capitalist government, the Okhrana, which had 15,000 members.

The Cheka executed at least 280,000 people between 1917-22. Many were left-wing activists or strikers and rebellious peasants.

The Kronstadt Uprising, 1921

In February 1921, there was general strike by workers in Petrograd. The workers wanted more food and better conditions.

The strike was crushed, and its leaders were executed by the Cheka.

The militant soldiers and sailors at the nearby Kronstadt navy base heard of these events.

The Kronstadt soldiers and sailors rose up.

Kronstadt called for the release of left-wing and anarchist political prisoners and free speech for all socialists. They demanded workers rights to free trade unions.

Kronstadt demanded that the peasants be allowed to control the land. They demanded new elections to the Soviets, and the removal of the privileges of the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks said the Kronstadt demands were “counter-revolutionary”, and smashed the rising with the military.

Kronstadt was trying to defend the original demands of the Russian revolution. But it was smashed.

The vast majority of the Kronstadt soldiers and sailors had been involved in the struggles of 1917. But they were gunned down.

This was the true face of Bolshevism in power.

Kronstadt was a threat to Bolshevik power.

Workers revolution was a threat to Bolshevik power.

The Bolsheviks had destroyed the Russian Revolution.

The Russian revolution was dead.

The country had moved from a liberating revolution by workers and peasants to a one-party state under the Marxists.

External Forces?

Some people say that the repression carried out by the Bolsheviks was good.

Some people say that the repression defended the revolution from reactionaries.

There was a threat from reactionary forces. Reactionary forces invaded Russia in mid-1918 to stop the revolution. This led to the Russian Civil War which lasted until the end of 1920.

This is fact.

But a right-wing threat cannot explain why worker militants and socialists were jailed.

A right-wing threat cannot explain why the power of the Soviets and factory committees was broken long before the start of the Civil War.

A right-wing threat cannot explain why the anarchists were repressed before the Civil War (the war began in June 1918).

A right-wing threat cannot explain why Kronstadt was repressed after the end of the Civil War (the war ended in December 1920).

The Lessons of October

Any revolution made from above will end up in a dictatorship.

Any revolution that puts reactionary generals in power of a workers army, that puts bosses back in factories, and that sets up death squads to murder strikers and socialists will fail.

Any revolution which is based on using government power will fail.

This was as Bakunin had warned in the First International 50 years before (see chapter 1).

A genuinely socialist and free society can only be created by the working class and working peasants acting on their own initiative to smash the chains of oppression.

This is where anarchists have always differed from Marx, and his successors such as the in Second International and the Bolsheviks or Communist Parties.

We stand for revolution from below and the greatest possible freedom.

They stand for revolution from above by a revolutionary dictatorship.

We recognise that Russia was not socialist – it was a type of government controlled capitalism. The collapse of the Soviet government in Russia in the 1990s is therefore not a defeat for socialism.

Nestor Makhno and the Ukraine, 1918-21

The Russian revolution did have to end in dictatorship. It was not forced into dictatorship by a “right-wing threat”. It ended up as a dictatorship because Marxism/Bolshevism is based on the idea of socialism from above.

The possibility of a different outcome is shown by events in the Ukraine.

In the Ukraine, the main revolutionary group were the anarchists (called “Makhnovshchina”).

Above we looked at how the Makhnovshchina was an anti-imperialist movement. Now let us contrast it with the Bolshevik dictatorship.

A worker-peasant army led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno expelled the forces of German imperialism. This Revolutionary Insurgent Army also defeated the right-wing armies that invaded in 1918.

The Revolutionary Insurgent Army was internally democratic, with all officers elected by the soldiers. It was under the control of Regional Congresses of Workers, Peasants and Insurgents made up of grassroots delegates.

Collectives

The achievements of the Makhnovshchina were not only military.

As the Revolutionary Insurgent Army moved through the Ukraine, the Makhnovshchina encouraged the peasants and farm workers to take the land and set up farming collectives.

Often this had to take second place to the need to fight and defeat the varied foreign armies of occupation.

The collectives showed that production could be organised to benefit all rather than to line the pockets of a few, despite a “right-wing threat”.

In the areas controlled by the Makhnovshchina, there was full freedom of speech and assembly.

This showed that full political rights for the masses were possible – in fact vital – despite the existence of a “right-wing threat”.

This showed that a democratic workers army could function effectively to defend the revolution.

The Makhnovist movement struggled tirelessly against anti-Jewish racism in the area (for more details, see Chapter 4). The Makhnovshchina were a progressive mass movement fighting racism and imperialism.

Betrayed

At first, the Makhnovshchina were hailed as heroes of the revolution by the Bolsheviks. In fact, the Makhnovshchina and Bolsheviks repeatedly worked together against the counter-revolutionary forces.

The Makhnovshchina were central to the defeat of the counter-revolutionary armies of Wrangel and Deniken. They prevented these armies from reaching Petrograd and Moscow.

But as soon as the counter-revolutionaries were defeated, the Bolsheviks turned on the anarchists.

The Bolsheviks tore up the treaties.

The Bolsheviks slandered the Makhnovshchina, saying that they were based amongst the rich, that they co-operated with the counter-revolutionaries, that they were anti-Jewish.

The Bolsheviks declared war on the Makhnovshchina. After a brutal struggle, the Bolshevik government defeated the Makhnovshchina.

Chapter 8: Anarchism in the 1920s and 1930s

The anarchists entered the 1920s as the true upholders of workers power and socialism from below.

Unlike many other socialists, they realised that the Russian Revolution had been destroyed.

Unlike the reformist socialists left over from the “Second International” – the Labour Parties and Social-Democratic Parties – they knew that revolution was the road to workers power

Unlike the Bolsheviks, they knew that socialism can only be built through freedom, not dictatorship.

In 1922 the anarchists formed an International Workers Association to unite their forces.

Made up mainly of Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, the International Workers Association had affiliates throughout the world, including Europe, Japan and the Americas. It also had contacts with sympathetic groups in India, China and North Africa.

At its height, the International Workers Association had 3 million members and 28 country sections.

The anarchists were also active in rural struggles amongst the peasants in countries such as Korea.

The Bolshevik Myth

But the anarchists faced severe challenges in the 1920s and 1930s.

For one thing, the Bolshevik government in Russia impressed many socialists across the world. Many thought that the Bolsheviks were building socialism (the opposite was true).

The Bolshevik government encouraged militants in other countries to set up their own Bolshevik or Communist Parties.

These parties often became very big, and challenged the anarchists for political leadership in the workers movement.

This weakened the anarchists. They faced a new, dynamic rival which was well-organised and attractive to many militants.

The result was a split in the revolutionary workers movement between Bolshevism and anarchism.

However, many anarchist movements retained their influence well into the 1930s.

In Italy, for example, the Italian Syndicalist Union had 100,000 members before 1914. By 1920, it had grown to 800,000.

In Spain, the National Confederation of Labour – an anarchist revolutionary trade union – grew from 100,000 members in 1914 to 2,000,000 in 1936.

The Fascist Threat

A much more serious threat to anarchism was State repression.

Great repression met the revolutions of 1916-22. The repression continued into the 1940s.

Because anarchists were so central to these revolts, they were very heavily hit by the repression.

The world revolution of 1916-22 was met by a world counter-revolution in the 1920s and 1930s.

From the early 1920s, the counter-revolution usually took the form of fascism (Nazism).

Fascism is an extreme right-wing movement funded by the bosses. It aims at a dictatorship capable of smashing the workers movement and ruling with an iron fist. Fascism is also typically racist and imperialist. It does not believe in women's rights.

The first mass fascist movement emerged in Italy. Here, right-wing gangs of thugs attacked unions, and attacked and murdered worker and socialist militants.

The Italian fascists took power in 1922, and then suppressed organisations such as the Italian Syndicalist Union.

Similar fascist movements and dictatorships swept the world in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of Europe, as well as Latin America and Japan, fell under fascist rule.

By the early 1930s, nearly all affiliates of the International Workers Association had been driven underground.

Resisting Fascist Barbarism

The anarchists were at the forefront of resistance to fascism.

Unlike the liberals and the reformist, they did not believe in making compromises with the fascists.

Unlike the liberals and reformists, they did not call on the government to stop the fascists. They knew that the government and the bosses' were supporting the rise of fascism.

The anarchists knew that only workers action – on the streets and in the workplace – could stop fascism.

In Italy, the anarchists sought to organise a united socialist-worker front against fascism. But the front was sabotaged by the Communist Party.

In Bulgaria, the anarchists launched an armed rising against the fascist dictatorship in 1923.

In Portugal, the anarchists organised powerful underground trade unions.

In Japan, the anarchists worked alongside other left-wing forces, but were driven underground in 1935.

In Spain, anarchist/syndicalist resistance to fascism sparked a worker-peasant revolution and a civil war in 1936.

The Spanish Revolution is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 9: The Spanish Revolution, 1936-7

Anarcho-syndicalism had a long and proud history in Spain.

In fact, the Spanish city of Barcelona was often called “the fiery rose of Anarchism”.

In 1911, the anarchists helped establish the National Confederation of Labour (CNT).

The CNT

The CNT was a anarchist trade union federation.

It aimed firstly to fight to improve conditions for workers. It aimed secondly to organise for the overthrow of capitalism.

This revolutionary trade union had nearly 2,000,000 members in 1936.

The CNT was especially strong in industrial areas, such as the province of Catalonia and its capital Barcelona.

But the CNT also had a large base among day labourers and small peasants in most provinces.

The CNT organised itself from the place of work. Each workplace joined in a federation with other workplaces in their region to form a regional committee. These regional committees were then federated on a national basis and formed a national committee. Within each particular industry there was also a regional and national federation.

Assemblies of workers were the core of the CNT. These made the decisions and elected delegates to regional and national level.

All delegates could be recalled and replaced by the assembly if the members were not satisfied with their conduct. Thus no decisions could be made without consulting the rank and file membership.

There were no full-time union bureaucrats beyond the control of the workers. The number of full-time officials was minimal. They were elected for specified periods after which they had to stand down and return to their previous job. At all times they were subject to control by the rank and file.

The anarchists did not restrict their activities to the workplace and the trade unions.

The anarchists also organised an anarchist political organisation called the Anarchist Federation of Iberia (FAI). The FAI worked within the CNT to defend anarchist ideas.

The anarchists organised rent boycotts in poor areas in Barcelona.

The anarchists set up youth and women’s organisations.

The anarchists organised workers centres and workers schools.

Fascism

The rich and powerful were very worried about the power of the CNT. They had tried to ban it in the 1920s, but it unbanned itself.

They had tried to murder its leaders, but FAI and CNT militants had fought back and organised revenge attacks.

They had murdered workers and mercilessly crushed workers uprisings in the early 1930s (at this time, the government included the so-called Socialist Party). But the CNT continued to grow.

Whole sections of the ruling class turned to fascism. Powerful figures in the Church, big business, and the army began to prepare a fascist seizure of power. The bosses wanted a dictatorship which could crush the CNT and the working-class.

July 19, 1936

In July 1936, a coalition of left-wing parties won the elections. The coalition was called the Popular Front, and claimed to be opposed to fascism.

In response, the fascists sought to seize power on July 19, 1936.

The fascists did manage to take control of parts of Spain.

But in most areas they were defeated. The CNT and the FAI were at the forefront of organising the workers and peasants to smash the fascists off the streets.

A Civil War broke out between the fascist-controlled areas and the anti-fascist areas (sometimes called the “Republican” zone). The anti-fascist zone was defended by the CNT and by the Popular Front government.

Social Revolution

The anarchists said that the working masses faced a choice: fascism or revolution.

For the anarchists, the 19 of July 1936 marked the start of the revolution.

The anarchists were the most popular group amongst the workers. Even the Communist party had less than 30,000 members.

The anarchists and the CNT organised the workers and the peasants to start seizing factories and capitalist farms.

Workers took over the factories. In Catalonia there were at least 2,000 industrial and commercial factory collectives.

At least 60% of agriculture in the anti-fascist areas was taken over by the peasants and farm-workers.

Self-Management in the Factories

The workplaces taken over by the workers’ were placed under workers self-management.

In each “collectivised” factory, the workers elected a factory committee for administration.

In each industry, all the collectivised enterprises were represented in an Economic Federation.

The Economic Federation was topped by a General Industrial Council which controlled the whole industry.

Here is a description of how the workers ran the gas, electricity, and water industry in Barcelona:

“Each type of job (e.g. fitters) set up a section consisting of at least fifteen workers. Where they were not the numbers to do this workers from different trades got together to constitute a general section. Each section nominates two delegates which are chosen by assemblies of the workers. One of the delegates will be of a technical calibre and will participate in the “comite” of the workplace. The other will be entrusted with the management of work in the section.

The “comite” of the building or plant comes next. It is nominated by the delegates of the sections and consists of a technician, a manual worker and an administrator. The manual worker has to solve difficulties which might arise between different sections. He or she receives suggestions from workers in the different trades and the sections give him or her daily reports on the progress of work. Periodically the delegate calls the sections to general meetings. At these, proposals and initiatives which are likely to improve production and productivity are studied as well as ones to improve the workers’ situation. A copy of the deliberation is sent to the Council for Industry.

The delegates with administrative functions supervises the arrival and warehousing of materials, records requirement details with book-keeping for supplies and reserves, and keeps an eye on the state of income and expenditure. S/He also deals with correspondence and it is his/her responsibility to see that balance sheets and reports addressed to the Council for Industry are prepared.

The delegate with technical functions supervises the activities of his section, and uses every endeavour to increase productivity. to lighten the workers’ burden by introducing new methods. S/He checks on production at the power stations, the state of the network, prepares statistics and charts indicating how production is developing. At the summit there are the Councils of Industry. One each for gas, electricity and water. Each is composed of eight delegates, four from the UGT (the reformist socialist trade union) and four from the CNT. These are capped by the General Council of the three industries, which is also made up by eight delegates drawn equally from the two unions.

This Council co-ordinates activities of the three industries; attunes the production and distribution of raw materials from a regional, national and international point of view; modifies prices; organises general administration; indeed takes and uses all initiatives useful to production and the workers’ needs. Meanwhile it is obliged at all times to submit its’ activities to the scrutiny of local and regional union assemblies”

On the Trams

Factory collectivisation was a big success.

Take for example the tramways.

Out of the 7,000 tramway workers 6,500 were members of the CNT.

The street battles of 19 July 1936 had disrupted all transport in Barcelona

The transport union of the CNT set up a committee to take over the administrative offices. It also set up a committee to inspect the tracks and draw up plans for repairs.

Five days after the fighting stopped 700 tramcars, instead of the usual 600, were operating. All were painted in the black and red colours of the CNT.

With the profit motive gone, safety became more important. The number of accidents was reduced.

Fares were lowered and services improved.

In 1936, 183,543,516 passengers were carried. In 1937 this had gone up by 50 million.

The trams were running so efficiently that the workers were able to give money to other sections of urban transport.

Wages were equalised for all workers and increased over the previous rates. For the first time free medical care was provided for the workforce.

As well as giving a more efficient service the workers found time to produce rockets and howitzers for the war effort.

In the three years of collectivisation there were only six cases in which workers stole from the workshops.

On the Land

The countryside also saw collectivisation.

For example, in Aragon, a province which was near the war front-line, collectivisation took root and spread like wildfire.

In February 1937 there were 275 collectives totalling 80,000 members. Three months later there were 450 collectives with 180,000 members.

Large estates were taken over by landless labourers.

Small peasants put their land together so that it could be worked more efficiently with machines.

The collectives were based around the villages and federated on a regional basis.

Usually the decision to collectivise was made at a mass meeting. All land, livestock, tools, seed, stocks of wheat and other produce was given over to the collective.

The land was then divided into sectors. Each sector was assigned to a work group of about 12 who elected their own delegate.

All products were communally owned. Some were used for local needs, others were used for exchange with other collectives.

People who did not want to join the collectives were not forced to. They were given enough land to farm on, but were forbidden to hire workers (because this would reintroduce a form of capitalism).

In the villages themselves, collective workshops were set up to produce tools, furniture, repairs and so on for the village.

The conditions of rural workers and working peasants was improved by the introduction of machinery.

Living standards rose, in the words of one collectivist "those who had less now ate more and better – no one went short".

Education became a central concern. Young children who had never been to school were given the education denied to them by the landlords.

The Workers Militia

In the early days of the revolution, the armed forces of the State had collapsed.

In their place, the anarchists, the CNT, and other left forces organised the armed workers and peasants into a democratic workers militia.

There were 150,00 volunteers willing to fight where they were needed. Most were members of the CNT.

All officers were elected by the rank-and-file and had no special privileges.

Women's Action

Gains were also made by women.

Women played a full part in the anti-fascist resistance.

Women were everywhere – on the workers committees, in the militias, and fighting on the front line.

Women were organising in the collectives.

Women were taking up the fight against the sexist attitudes of the past which have no place in any real revolution.

Women were in the workers militia and fought alongside the men as equals.

The anarchist women's organisation, Mujeres Libres (Free Women) had 30,000 members.

Mujeres Libres organised working-class women. It stood for class struggle. It worked closely with the CNT, FAI and the anarchist youth organisation.

Mujeres Libres had been active before the revolution. It organised women workers and distributed information on contraception.

During the war abortion was legalised in the anti-fascist zone. Centres were opened for women, including unmarried mothers and prostitutes.

From all accounts there truly were changes in attitudes towards women. One woman participant in the Civil War has said:

It was like being brothers and sisters. It had always annoyed me that men in this country didn't consider women as beings with full human rights. But now there was this big change. I believe it arose spontaneously out of the revolutionary movement.

This sort of thing is common to most revolutionary situations. When people begin to throw off the old ideas and start creating a new society their views on many things change.

This does not take away the need to constantly fight against women's oppression.

The Revolution Defeated

But the revolution was defeated in 1939.

The Fascists won the war and crushed the CNT.

How could this happen?

The fascists were backed by powerful interests, including Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

The anarchists made mistakes. Instead of organising the working class and working peasants to take full power, they tried to unite all anti-fascist forces.

This required many compromises which forced the CNT to hold back on its full programme. In fact, the CNT even sent Ministers into the Popular Front government in the anti-fascist zone.

But government exists to defeat the workers. The Popular Front government was opposed to the collectives and the workers army.

From an early stage it tried to bring them under State control.

It sabotaged the workers militia by not supplying it with weapons. It undermined the collectives and sent the police and the army to smash the collectives.

This demoralised the workers. The workers could not see the point of fighting fascism at the front when even in the anti-fascist zone they were being repressed.

The State preferred to risk a fascist victory than let the workers run society.

The Communist Party was in the Popular Front. It played a large part in undermining the militia and the collectives.

The Communist Party was opposed to anarchism.

The Communist Party wanted to prevent a revolution, because this would have increased Western aggression against Russia.

Lessons of the Spanish Revolution

Given the right conditions mutual aid and co-operation will flourish. Workers, peasants and the poor can create a new world without bosses or a government.

The CNT should have stuck to its original programme, instead of making compromises. It should have overthrown the government and fought for all power to the workers. Only in this way could both fascism and the treachery of the Popular Front be stopped.

Chapter 10: A World to Win

After World War Two

With the defeat of the Spanish Revolution, one of the biggest anarchist organisations in the world had been driven underground.

By 1939, fascism was triumphant in almost all independent countries. In the colonies, dictatorial forms of government were common.

The stage was set for World War Two in 1939. World War Two was a war between fascist and democratic States.

On the one side were the Allied “democratic powers”: the USA, France, and Britain, Russia and their allies. On the other side were the Axis powers: fascist Italy, fascist Japan, and Nazi Germany.

World War Two was not a war to end fascism.

Fascist countries such as Portugal and Spain which stayed after the war were left alone. They remained fascist until the 1970s.

As for the “democratic” countries, France and Britain both had vast colonial empires run by racist dictatorships. And the Russian government was similar in most ways to a fascist government.

World War Two was a war between rival ruling classes for world power.

Anarchists against War and Fascism

In World War Two, the anarchists faced further repression.

Nazi Germany and fascist Italy occupied large parts of Europe which were not previously under fascism, such as France, Holland and Poland.

Fascist Japan extended its conquests in south Asia, and increased repression in countries such as Korea.

Armed underground anarchist resistance groups were active throughout the war.

The anarchists organised guerrilla action against the fascists in Italy, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Korea.

In Spain, anarchist guerrilla activity continued into the 1970s.

The War ended with the defeat of the fascist or “Axis” powers in 1945.

In Italy, anarchist guerrilla forces were involved in the land seizures that took place after the war. But the land seizures were defeated by the combined forces of the Italian Communist Party and the Allied countries.

Russia occupied most of Eastern Europe, as well as East Germany, after 1945. The Russian government was determined to wipe out anarchism in the area it controlled.

In Bulgaria, the anarchist movement grew rapidly after 1945. But it was repressed by the Russian-backed Bulgarian Communist Party in 1948. Hundreds were executed or sent to concentration camps.

Anarchists in other East European countries, as well as in China, North Korea, and, later, Cuba, shared a similar fate.

The 1950s: “The Dark Decade”

Reeling under the hammer blows of fascism and communism, anarchism was at its weakest in the 1940s and 1950s

There was only one functioning trade union left in the International Workers Association. This was the SAC in Sweden – Sweden was not taken over by fascism.

Because Russia had played an important role in World War Two, the popularity of the Communist Parties grew. This further weakened anarchism.

The Communist Parties and the reformist socialists came to dominate the socialist movement. Anarchism was margined in mass struggles in this period.

It was only able to play a limited role in the anti-colonial struggles that took place after 1945. It was however, involved in the decolonisation of Korea, and the struggle to liberate Algeria in the 1950s.

The Rebirth

But anarchism was far from dead.

It re-emerged in the student and worker revolts that took place in the late 1960s.

Anarchism was particularly prominent in the May 1968 uprising in France. In May and June 1968, a mass student protest spiraled into a general strike and factory occupation movement that involved ten million workers. Predictably, the Communist Party (which then controlled the CGT) did its best to help break the revolution.

Anarchists also played a role in student-worker struggles in Japan, Mexico and the USA.

In the 1970s, the movement grew much more rapidly. One big reason was that the fascist dictatorship in Spain collapsed in the mid-1970s. This allowed the CNT to organise openly. The CNT soon recruited several hundred thousand members.

The International Workers Association also began to revive.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the movement grew rapidly.

Older organisations have been revived.

Anarchist organisations have emerged in countries where no such tradition previously existed (for example, Turkey and Nigeria).

Today, there are organisations throughout Europe, North America, Latin America, and a number of Asian and African countries.

In some of these countries they are the only, or at least the biggest force on the revolutionary left. This is the case in Venezuela.

The International Workers Association now has 18 member sections.

Anarchists were among the first sections of the left to resume activity in Eastern Europe.

Anarchists held the first opposition march in Moscow since the 1920s on the 28 May 1988: the march was under a banner stating “Freedom without Socialism is Privilege and Injustice – Socialism without Freedom is Slavery and Brutality”. This is a quote from Bakunin.

Groups have emerged throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Russia.

Anarchists are active in the republics of former Yugoslavia, where they have begun to co-operate against the war.

The Crisis of Marxism

The growth of anarchism is a real contrast to the situation of other sections of the left.

The Communist Parties and the parties of the reformist socialists – Social-Democrats and Labour Parties – have been in rapid decline since the 1980s.

But anarchism has re-established itself and started to grow.

We have a firm base from which to grow.

We have a firm base from which to re-establish ourselves as the key revolutionary movement in the twenty-first century.

To do this, we must learn from the mistakes of our past, and immerse ourselves in the struggles of the masses.

Bread, and Roses too

History is not neutral.

In school we are told that we need governments and bosses. We are told that history is a struggle between different governments. We are told that only the rich and powerful make history.

What we are not told is that ordinary people have fought the bosses and rulers every step of the way.

We are not told that governments and capitalism are not necessary.

People are not inherently bad. Given the right conditions a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation can grow.

How we act is related to the structure of society.

When oppression and exploitation are taken away, then the “goodness” that is in most of us comes through and flourishes as it did when the workers held the reigns in Russia and Spain.

Join Us!

What anarchists are saying are not just “nice” ideas.

History shows us that these ideas can work. A new society can be created with the workers and working peasants in control.

But it won't happen spontaneously – We must organise for it.

That is why we need revolutionary organisation. An organisation that draws together all those fighting for workers control. An organisation that gives us the chance to exchange ideas and experiences, and to learn from the lessons of history.

We do not need a group of leaders and their passive followers. We do not need a so-called “vanguard party” dictating from on high.

What we need is an organisation working towards mobilising the mass of ordinary people in the process of making the revolution.

If you like what you have just read, if you want to be part of the fastest growing movement on the left, you should think about joining us.

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