

What is Anarcho-Syndicalism?

Workers' Solidarity Federation

1997

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This pamphlet provides a short introduction to the politics of the Workers Solidarity Federation (South Africa)¹. We are an Anarcho-Syndicalist organisation.

¹ Some of the classic introductions to Anarchism and Syndicalism are N.Makhno, P. Archinov and others, *The Organisational Platform of the Anarchist Communists*, A. Berkman, *What is Communist Anarchism* and *ABC of Anarchism* (these two books form a two-part series), R.Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (also reprinted in Felix Gross (ed.), *European Ideologies*).

Part 1: What is Anarcho-Syndicalism?

INTRODUCTION: ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM OUTLINED

What does this mean? Briefly stated, Anarcho-Syndicalism is a working-class political ideology that opposes all forms of exploitation and domination. We think that all people are fundamentally equal, and should have the freedom to live their lives as they see fit, as long as they do not harm the freedom of other people. We oppose capitalism because it is a vicious profit system that is based on the exploitation of the workers and the poor to the benefit of a small class of bosses and top government figures. We do not think that the government (courts, army, bureaucracy) is there to look after everyone, instead its role is to keep the ruling class in power. Racism and other forms of special oppression are primarily the product of capitalism and the State. In South Africa, racism was created to “justify”, strengthen and deepen the exploitation of the Black working class in the mines, farms and factories.

This unjust social system, which impoverishes and oppresses the majority of the world’s population, must be resisted and defeated. It cannot be reformed away. As long as this system exists, there will be poverty, repression and racism. The only people who can fight and overthrow capitalism, the State and all forms of oppression, are the working and poor people. Only these people—the working class and working peasants—can manage the job because only they have no vested interest in the system, because they have power in their ability to organise (particularly in the workplace), and because they produce all the wealth of the world. Only a productive class can make a free, anti-authoritarian society because only such a class is not based on exploitation.

In place of capitalism we want a free socialistic economic system in which the workers and peasants directly control the land and factories, and use these resources to produce for the benefit of all. In place of the State, we want to manage our own affairs through grassroots workplace and community councils, united at the local, regional, national and international levels. We call this system “anarchism” or “stateless socialism” or “libertarian socialism”.

We do not think that the State can be made to help ordinary people. The only language the bosses understand is the language of mass struggle from below. This is the only way to win any gains in the here and now, and definitely the only way to smash the system in the long run. Relying on the State to make the revolution is a recipe for disaster, in every country where a “revolutionary government” got into power the result was a social system at least as oppressive as the one that got overthrown. Russia was not socialist, it was a one-party State in which a Communist Party-bureaucratic elite ran a “State-capitalist” system.

Instead of using the State, we believe that the struggle and the revolution must come about through mass democratic movements of the workers and the poor. In particular, we emphasise the revolutionary potential of trade unions. The trade unions can organise the workers to fight the bosses in the here and now, we all know that. The unions can also provide the vehicle for the workers to take-over, and directly manage, the factories, mines, farms and offices. The role of an organisation such as the Workers Solidarity Federation is not to make the revolution “for”

the masses. It is to help to organise and educate the masses to march to freedom in their own name. We are opposed to all forms of oppression and support all everyday struggles to improve the conditions under which we live. We promote the self-activity and revolutionary awareness of the masses.

This set of ideas is not something invented by a few philosophers. Instead, Anarcho-syndicalism was created by the working class itself in the course of its struggles. It first emerged in the 1870s in the First International Workers Association, an international federation of trade unions and workers societies. Since then, it has had an magnificent, proud fighting history as a mass movement of the working and poor people in all continents of the world. Our movement has historically attracted millions of workers and peasants because it serves their needs, not the needs of power-seekers and exploiters.

In the rest of this pamphlet, we will explain why we see things like this. We will discuss how we see current situation in the world today, issues like unemployment, poverty and repression. Where do these things come from and what can be done to stop them? We also look at issues like trade unions and the fight for democracy. Are these delivering all that we hope? What can be done about the situation? What should we be fighting for? Finally, we also outline some of the history of the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement. Can workers run society? Where are the achievements of the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement? What are our failures? What are we doing these days?

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISTS ARE AGAINST CHAOS

Can the masses actually run society? No! say the presses of the bosses and exploiters. It will be “chaos”. Are Anarcho-Syndicalists advocates of “chaos”? Yes, thunder the politicians who live off the sweat of the masses. Without the State, there would be “chaos”. The myth is created that we believe in violence for the sake of it. We say that these “esteemed” and learned gentlemen are liars. We say that the masses are better able to decide their own fate than all the bosses and rulers.

Did you ever wonder about society today? Did you ever come to the conclusion that perhaps we are already living in chaos? At the moment thousands of construction workers are unemployed yet millions of homeless people need housing to live in. The price of basic foods are incredibly high yet every year the commercial farmers restrict production just to keep prices and profits high. Thousands of people are dying of starvation around the world yet millions of rands are spent every day on nuclear arms which have the potential for wiping us and the world out.

You might ask why is this so? We say that there are two big reasons – PROFIT AND POWER!

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

We live in a capitalist society. By capitalism we mean a system in which different firms compete with each other in the market to make profits.

Under capitalism the means of production- the land, factories, mines, offices and so on- are owned and controlled by a small section of society: senior managers, bosses, employers, and top

government officials. These people- the ruling class- live off the profits and dividends they make through their business activities and top government posts.

Most people can only make a living by working for a wage or by earning growing cash crops to sell. Those who are dependent on the earning of a wage are the working class (blue collar workers, white collar workers, workers in the service sector, farmworkers, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised youth, rank-and-file soldiers). Those who make a living through farming with family labour, and who don't employ others, are called the working peasantry. Systems like plantation slavery were also part of capitalism because were organised around making profit for a few rich men.

In capitalism there is also a middle-class made up of professionals, middle level management and small capitalists.

We are opposed to the capitalist system. Capitalism is based on exploitation. Because the bosses own the factories, banks, mines, etc. the workers have to sell their labour to the boss for a wage. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of the worker for as little wages as possible so that he/she can maintain high profits. Thus the more wages workers get the less profits the bosses make.

As a rule, workers never get the full value of their labour back in wages. The same goes for the working peasants. The lower prices the bosses and state marketing boards can pay the peasant for the crops, the more profits they make. The ruling class live off these profits- and use them to get richer by setting up more and bigger firms. Practically all productive work is done by the workers and working peasants (the only exception to this general rule are some sections of the middle class who do useful productive work (e.g. doctors, teachers). The ruling class is parasitic and lives off the working and poor people.

Clearly, the interests of the ruling class, on the one hand, and the working class and working peasantry, on the other, are in total opposition to each other: capitalism systematically produces, and is based on, inequalities in wealth, power and opportunity. It is almost impossible for an ordinary person to make enough money to set up in business. Instead, the rich get richer at the expense of the poor: in 1960 the richest 20% of the world's population got 70% of the world's income- by the 1990s, the elite 20% got a massive 85% of the world's income (United Nations Human Development Report, 1996).

Capitalism is also an authoritarian and undemocratic system. At the workplace level, capitalist enterprises are run by unelected managers and owners who make all key decisions on the basis of profit. The vast majority of people in a workplace – the workers – have no real say at all. At the societal level, class inequality systematically excludes most people from active and equal involvement in political activity e.g. lack of time, education. This same class inequality also exists at the level of the government (see below).

Capitalism puts profit before human needs. Production under capitalism is not based on the needs of ordinary people. Production is for profit. Therefore although there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, people starve because profits come first. Food is not given out on the basis of hunger, but on the basis of ready cash. The bosses would rather let food rot than give it away for free.

This is why capitalism is also an inefficient and wasteful economic system: there is no planning beforehand to make sure that enough goods are made to meet needs- instead, the bosses have the goods made, and then try to sell them. If not enough people have money to buy the goods, they are just thrown away. There is no match between what is actually needed and what is actually

produced. Poverty, bad working conditions etc. all take a back seat to the goal of making money. Instead of values like mutual aid, and solidarity, capitalism promotes ruling class values like greed, aggression, and a hunger for power.

Finally, as we show later, capitalism is also a primary cause of racism and other forms of oppression. Racism was developed to justify slavery, colonialism and apartheid-capitalism (see below).

THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Capitalist must be fought and ultimately overthrown. The only people can successfully accomplish these tasks are the masses of the people- the workers, the poor, and the working peasants. Because the workers produce all wealth, they have a powerful weapon in their hands: their ability to hit the bosses to disrupt the profit system through workplace action like strikes, go-slows, occupations etc. This ability to hit the bosses where it hurts most- in the pocket- is the most powerful weapon in the hands of ordinary people. Workers resistance is aided by the concentration of workers in large factories which makes it easier to develop the resistance organisations that we call the trade unions. But this does not mean that only workers can fight back- working class neighbourhoods and schools also bring people together in large numbers in a way that facilitates action. And peasants have proved themselves again and again as capable of massive fightbacks against the exploiters. Overall, then, we believe that class struggle is the most effective way for ordinary people to fight back.

The ruling class will never get rid of capitalism. They will fight to defend capitalism because they benefit from it. Even the middle class is generally too privileged to support radical change. So there is little point in trying to involve the rich and powerful in a movement against capitalism. They live in different conditions to ordinary people, and have different interests. The ruling class can only be kept in a coalition with ordinary people if that coalition does not do anything too “threatening” (like opposing capitalism). Only productive classes like the workers and peasants can build a free, non-authoritarian society because only these classes do not exploit- they do not live off other people’s backs.

Class struggle is also the way to defeat forms of oppression like racism. Because these forms of oppression are rooted in capitalism and the State, they can only be defeated by an anti-capitalist struggle. Such a struggle can only be made by the workers, the poor and the working peasants. Rich blacks may not like racism but they do like capitalism and so they will, when push comes to shove, defend the profit system against the Black working class. Their privileged class position shields them from the worst effects of racism. They can go to fancy schools and live in the suburbs- we can’t.

The fight against racism and other oppressions is not something separate to the class struggle: these are working class issues. We say this for the following reasons. Firstly, these oppressions are rooted in capitalism and the State, and can therefore only be finally defeated by a class struggle and a revolution by the workers and the poor. Secondly, the majority of people who are affected by these forms of oppression are obviously working and poor people. In fact, working and poor people suffer far more from the effects of these forms of oppression because they are not shielded by their class status. Thirdly, a united struggle by the working class, working peasants and the poor can only take place if people are mobilised around all of the issues that affect

them. This includes racism, rents, low wages etc. in other words, the working and poor people can only be united and mobilised on the basis of opposing all oppression and all exploitation, on the basis of a programme that addresses all of the ordinary people's concerns: this programme is Anarcho-syndicalism.

We believe that capitalism and all forms of oppression can only be ended for once and for all when the workers, the poor and the working peasants overthrow the ruling class and create a democratic stateless socialistic society based on grassroots democracy. That is to say, an Anarcho-Syndicalist society. In the course of this social revolution, the middle class will probably also split, with part of it siding with the bosses and part of it siding with the revolutionary masses.

This revolution cannot come through, and must not preserve, the State.

WHAT IS THE STATE?

For the needs of the workers, the poor and the working peasantry to be fully met we must get rid of the bosses and rulers, that is, the ruling class. But this is no easy task. The bosses are organised. They have the mainstream newspapers, TV, and magazines on their side.

They also have the State (army, police, government departments, Parliament) and the forces of repression that go with it. We only have to look at the struggles and repression of the 1980s in South Africa to see how the forces of the state can be used against the working class and poor .

The state (i.e. governments, armies, courts, police, etc.) is a direct result of the fact that we live in a class society. A society where only 5% of the people own 85% of the wealth, 120,000 capitalist farmers own almost all land in the historically "White areas", and 5 big companies control 80% of all shares on the Stock Exchange (South African figures ca. 1994) .

The state is there to protect the interests of this minority, the ruling class, if not by persuasion then by force. Laws are made not to protect us but to protect those who own the property and have the power.

The State is built in a way that allows the minority to rule the minority: it is a very centralised, bureaucratic, hierarchical(top-down) structure of rule over a territory that concentrates power in the hands of the few at the top. There is absolutely no way that ordinary people can participate in the running of this apparatus. These features — authoritarianism, violence, centralisation, bureaucracy, hierarchy, territory, class rule — are the defining characteristics of all States, including the so-called socialist states such as Russia/the Soviet Union (see below for more on Russia).

The State pretends to be a neutral governing body, ruling in the interests of all. The reality is very different. When workers go on strike they are met by police dogs and rubber bullets, as well as media hostility and the threat of dismissal. But the bosses who exploit workers and throw people out of work or off the land and into more misery never face punishment. Who has ever heard of the bosses being assaulted and arrested by the police during a strike?! No. The bosses are called "investors" and treated to all sorts of perks and government support.

If you think that the State is there to protect you, think about the fact that most tax in South Africa is collected from ordinary people through VAT, rents and rates. The companies pay under 25% of all tax (SA figures, ca. 1994).

CAN WORKERS FREEDOM COME THROUGH PARLIAMENT?

Anarcho-Syndicalism — workers freedom — cannot come through Parliament. If we look at a country like Chile we can see why. In 1973 the people elected a moderate socialist government led by President Allende. This democratically elected government was toppled by a CIA backed military coup. Repression followed in which the workers movement was smashed and thousands of militants lost their lives.

This happened for two reasons. The Chilean socialists did not understand that real power is not in the Parliament but in the boardrooms of the multinationals, the State bureaucracy, and the military. The choices that the government makes are not determined by the voters but in the end by the needs and demands of the ruling class. For example, we never voted for privatisation but it is happening anyway. This is because it is in the interests of, and is demanded by, the bosses and rulers.

This point is not understood by the so-called socialist parties who run in elections (these are often called “Social-Democrats”). In the 1980’s in France, Spain and Greece ‘socialist’ governments are pushed working class peoples living standards down because international banks wanted loans repaid and multinational corporations wanted to maintain profits.

The second reason is that the Chileans did not smash the state but tried to capture it peacefully. We must understand that the army and police are against us. They are there to protect the wealth of the ruling class. To make a revolution it will be necessary to use violence, not because we believe in violence for the sake of it, but because we recognise that the ruling class will not give up its wealth without a fight. There must be democratic workers militia under the control of democratic workers organisations like the trade unions, to defend the revolution against the ruling class when it happens. Allende refused to arm the workers and so made the job of the military much easier.

So clearly, we should boycott elections and rely on mass action to win changes and to build real democratic stateless socialism (Anarcho-Syndicalism). We should not work inside the political parties. Working within the parties is futile because these parties cannot change society. Also, it is dangerous because it promotes illusions in the State and politicians. Real socialism (anarcho-syndicalism) does not come through electing socialists to Parliament but through the direct action of the workers, working peasants and the poor taking control of the factories and land. The State is a hierarchical, bureaucratic pillar of ruling class power and must be destroyed. For us, a genuine, stateless socialist society in which workers and peasants actually run things for their own benefit, can only come from below, not from the top.

ELECTIONS: PUTTING CROSSES ON A PIECE OF PAPER

We are led to believe that the State is run in our interests. Don’t we have elections to ensure that any government not behaving itself can be brought to task?

People often say that if we really want to change things we should run in elections. Take a good look at this idea and it becomes clear that it cannot be done if we are to remain true to our Anarcho-Syndicalism.

Electioneering inevitably leads to revolutionaries forsaking their revolutionary principles.

Look at the so-called Labour Party in Britain. First of all they do not go to the people with a clear socialist message. They go for whatever is popular and will ensure that they get elected. This becomes more important to them than educating people about the meaning of socialism. It also means that they look on the mass of voters as mere spectators. People are seen as voters, not as people who can be actually involved in politics and bringing socialism about.

We do not accept that we should hand over the running of our lives to 400 or so people who are not accountable between elections and can basically do whatever they like. To 400 people who enjoy, and are corrupted by, all the benefits of luxurious Parliamentary lifestyles, the gravy train. In fact, we would say that these politicians are part of the ruling class because they live off the workers, and because they defend and manage capitalism and the State.

Parliamentary democracy is about putting numbers on a piece of paper every five years. We are given a choice all right but between parties who all agree with the system of a tiny minority ruling the country.

DEFEND AND ADVANCE DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS WITH MASS STRUGGLE

This is not to say that there is no difference between life under a dictatorship and life under a capitalist Parliament. Of course there is. At least under the Parliament people have a few political rights, whilst they have none under a dictator or one-party State. These include freedom of speech and association, limited rights to protests and some protection from racist and sexist practices. Therefore, we Anarcho-Syndicalists support all struggles for increased political freedom. We recognise that the holding of the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa was a massive advance for the struggle because it is better to live in under a parliament than a racist regime. (Having said this, however, we still recognise that Parliament is undemocratic and dominated by the ruling class- the generals, rich men and bosses, state managers and professional politicians).

But the important thing to note is that these rights do not come through the “kind” hand of the ruling class. Instead they are forced on the State by mass struggle by the oppressed classes, and must be defended and advanced in the same way. It is mass action which drives all progressive change in society. It was struggle that broke the pass laws. It was struggle that broke the ban on African trade unions. It was struggle that led to the replacement of the racist Apartheid dictatorship by a capitalist Parliament.

Although we are revolutionaries, we do not think that we should around for the revolution to sort everything out. The revolution is essential, but it is also important that we resist the ruling class and fight oppression in the here and now. Winning small gains through struggle is important because it can bring economic and political improvements for the working masses, because it gives the masses confidence in their ability to fight back and win, and because it helps lay the basis for the revolution. It prepares people for the revolution by organising them on the ground in opposition to the system, and by opening them up to revolutionary ideas. It is thus important that we get involved in all everyday struggles whilst linking these demands to the ultimate goal of a worker-peasant revolution.

HOW IDEAS CHANGE

From the moment we are born we are taught that we must give up control of our lives to those supposedly more capable of running things — that we must put our faith and loyalty in government and bosses to organise our lives. In school, in the newspapers and on television the working class, the poor and the working peasants are portrayed as sheep who need to be led and governed over. Even in the unions, the important organisations of the working class, workers are discouraged from taking any initiative by themselves. Instead they are treated by the union bureaucracy supposedly on the workers' behalf.

However, the class system constantly forces the different classes into conflict. The capitalists in their mad rush for profits are forced to keep workers' pay and conditions at the lowest possible level. In times of recession (economic decline) competition between capitalists increases, and if profits are to be maintained capitalists demand that workers must accept cuts in their pay and conditions.

An example of this ruling class response to the recession created by its insane system is for the government to apply austerity and economic liberalisation programmes that cut social services, remove subsidies on basic goods like bread, retrench workers, privatise industries and undermine workers rights. The bosses and rulers call this creating an “investor friendly climate” and a “competitive economy” . We call it an attack on the working class and poor. Examples are the ESAPs (Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes) in sub-Saharan Africa, and the proposed government plan in South Africa : the “Growth, Employment and Redistribution” strategy in South Africa.

It is when workers, the poor and the working peasants are forced into conflict with their enemies — the bosses and rulers — that they realise their own strength. When workers go on strike they find that they are not powerless. Without labour all production grinds to a halt. The bosses simply cannot run the factories by themselves. Workers who go on strike begin to rely on their own collective strength, they realise that if they are going to win they must stick together. They become more aware of what they can achieve and they become open to more ideas, new ideas.

This was seen in the 1984/5 British miners strike. Before the strike most miners believed womens' role was in the home minding the children. But as the strike began, women took the initiative and set up support groups to aid the strike. Women actively took part in picketing as well as fund-raising. Faced with this many miners changed their sexist ideas. Their ideas about the police and the courts also changed. In conflict, they realised the main purpose of the police and courts was to protect the bosses and smash the strike.

This is not to say that workers going on strike set out with Anarcho-Syndicalist/ Socialist goals in mind. However when workers win on 'bread and butter' issues, their confidence increases and so does their faith in their own ability to organise themselves. That is one of the reasons for Anarcho- Syndicalists being involved in organising and supporting strikes — to build the links between workers' day-to-day struggles and our aim of a truly equal society.

WHY MARXISM FAILED

Central to our politics is the belief that ordinary people must make the revolution. Every member of the working class and working peasantry has a role to play. Only by this participation can we ensure that Anarcho-Syndicalism is made real. We believe in a revolution that comes from the bottom up and is based on democratic factory and community organisations. Freedom cannot be given, it has to be taken.

This is where we disagree with what is called the Marxist “revolutionary left”. While they say that they agree with all this they still hold to a belief that a vanguard left-wing party is necessary to make the revolution for the people.

Most of them base their ideas on the famous Communist Lenin who believed that workers were only capable of achieving what he called “trade union consciousness”¹. That is to say, the workers are only to focus on “bread and butter” issues, not develop their own revolutionary politics in the course of struggles with the bosses. According to him, this meant that socialism could only come from outside the class struggle, from the middle class intellectuals. What was needed was a centralised and hierarchical (top-down control structure) “vanguard party” of “professional revolutionaries” to make the revolution for the (ignorant) masses. Thus, the Bolsheviks (Russian Communist Party) understood the term “dictatorship of the proletariat” to mean not the direct rule of the whole working class, but the rule of the Party on behalf of the working class.

It is true that Lenin did not believe in a coup, he believed the masses had to be mobilised, but this mobilisation’s function was only to help the party get into power to actually make the revolution. As Trotsky, another famous Marxist/Communist put it “Without a guiding organisation the energy of the masses will dissipate like steam in a piston box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam”². Absent from this view is the idea that the working class is anything more than mindless material driving the “real” makers of history, the vanguard Communist Party, who would give the instructions. Our point is precisely that the Bolsheviks did not believe it possible for the working class to plan and co-ordinate production, in short to break down this distinction between steam and piston. We reject as fundamentally dishonest the view put out by some modern Marxists that Lenin, Trotsky and other leaders of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party that seized power in the Russian Revolution were champions of workers self-management and workers democracy. Marxism is an essentially authoritarian ideology.

Lenin and Trotsky were dead clear that they saw socialism as something to be forcefully imposed from above by a one-party State under the control of so-called “professional revolutionaries” like themselves. For them socialism had nothing to do with workers taking charge of society. Lenin saw socialism as a centralised, State-run economy, very similar to the war-time economies established in Europe during World War 1: thus, in 1918 Lenin advised his supporters to “study the State-capitalism of the Germans, to adopt it with all possible strength, not to spare dictatorial methods to hasten its adoption”³.

¹ see V.I. Lenin, (1904), What is to be Done?

² L.Trotsky, The History of the Russian Revolution, Pluto, p.19.

³ Lenin, (1918), On Left Infantilism and the Petty Bourgeois Spirit, cited in EH Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, p99. emphasis added.

In 1921, for example, Lenin sneered at calls for a congress of workers, united in their trade unions, to plan the economy from below in the following terms⁴:

- “A producers’ Congress! What precisely does that mean? It is difficult to find words to describe this folly. I keep asking myself, can they be joking? Can one really take these people seriously? While production is always necessary, democracy is not. Democracy of production generates a series of radically false ideas”.

Similarly, Trotsky denounced those who were critical of the Communist Party’s practice of suppressing free political activity on the grounds that such critics⁵

- “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!”

The result of this undemocratic thinking is to be clearly seen in the Eastern Europe and Soviet Union. What existed in Russia has nothing to do with real socialism. Power rested in the hands of a tiny Communist Party elite. The state was the boss and the workers were still exploited through the wage system and told what to do. Workers did not control their workplaces. All power was held by the party bureaucracy. As early as 1918, Anarcho-Syndicalists realised that the system being established in Russia was not socialist: it was State-capitalism.

As Anarcho-Syndicalists we reject this fake “socialism”. We are not definitely not Marxists. We think that a genuine socialist society must be democratic and egalitarian. It must be run by the working class and working peasants, and not by some government or party.

It is no wonder these countries have collapsed and these governments have fallen! The tiny elite was unable to run the economy properly or meet people’s basic needs, and its oppression was such ordinary people fought back and overthrew the Marxist governments through mass action. But full freedom has not been achieved in these countries even today. A new ruling class of politicians, capitalists and the old party elite is in power. A workers revolution will be necessary to bring in true freedom. We will look at Russia below in some more detail. For now, it is just important to note that the collapse of the Soviet bloc has created a gigantic crisis in the Marxist movements, with most organisations losing many members or collapsing, whilst those that survive generally lack any clear way forward or hope for the future.

WE CAN DO IT!

So we say it is up to ordinary people. Some ask is this possible? Would it not be chaotic? Of course not. At the moment capitalism would collapse without the support of the working class and working peasantry. We make everything, we produce all the wealth. It is possible to organise production so that the needs of all are met. It is also possible to create structures that allow

⁴ Lenin, (1921), at 10th Congress of the Communist Party of USSR, cited in D. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: the Left-Wing Alternative*, p232.

⁵ L.Trotsky, *Sochineya*, Moscow 1925, p89, 236, cited in Nove, *Studies in Economics and Russia*, 1990, 181 et seq.

everyone to participate in making the decisions that affect them. The basis for the new society will be laid in the present by the spread of our revolutionary ideas, and by the development of workers and peasants organisations such as the trade unions.

DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM

As already stated society would be based on democratic and grassroots factory and community organisations. These would federate with each other so that decisions could be made covering large areas. Delegates could be sent from each area and workplace. They would be recallable, i.e. if those who voted them in are not happy with their behaviour they can immediately replace them with someone else. These structures would also be in charge of the internally democratic workers militia that will be needed to defend the revolution against the bosses and rulers. With the new technology such as the Internet it will be much easier to involve lots of people in making quick decisions. There would be no state or capitalist system but instead a stateless socialist (Anarcho-Syndicalist) society.

Within this society there would be genuine individual freedom. Individuals would have to contribute to society but would be free to the extent that they do not interfere with the freedom of others. There would be full freedom of speech, movement and association. We do not advocate the suppression of people who disagree with us! Religion would not be persecuted. Fundamentally we believe that people are good and if they won freedom would not easily give it up or destroy it.

THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARIES

So where do Anarcho-Syndicalists fit into all this? We don't set ourselves up as "the leaders who know it all". We believe that our ideas are good and are worth trying out. We believe it is necessary for those agreeing with them to organise together in an organisation like the Workers Solidarity Federation so that our ideas will spread and be understood by a lot more people. To us it is important that those revolutionaries active in different areas are brought together so that experiences can be shared and learned from. We believe that in day-to-day struggles or in campaigns it is important that the message is driven home that only a revolution made by the working class and working peasantry can give us ordinary, oppressed and exploited people the freedom to run society so that all our needs are met. We see our role as encouraging the initiative of working people and arguing for structures which allow people to take part in local or workplace activities. We do not aim to take power and make the revolution from above.

We do not believe that the revolution is around the corner. We believe that making it is a slow process during which there may be huge jumps forward. Overall though it is a slow process of spreading ideas and building peoples confidence to bring about change. We accept that winning reforms and short term demands are all part of this process. We also accept the need to work alongside other progressive organisations forces in immediate struggles so long as co-operation does not compromise our right to argue for our politics.

On to part 2 where we set out some of our ideas in relation to society today⁶

⁶ All of these issues are outlined in much greater depth in the Constitution and Position Papers of the Workers Solidarity Federation (South Africa), (1997-Forthcoming).

Part 2: Some of our ideas in relation to society today

FIGHTING AND DEFEATING RACISM

Anarcho- Syndicalists fight all domination and exploitation. The fight against racism is a central part of our program. We believe that all human beings are fundamentally equal and alike. We do not think that racism is a natural or inevitable part of society. Instead, racism is rooted in the class system, capitalism and the State.

The roots of racism

Racism developed alongside capitalism and the modern State since these emerged 500 years ago. It justified the conquest, slaughter and enslavement of indigenous people in the Americas, Asia and Africa. Later racism was used to divide and rule the working class majority, and to super-exploit and repress sections of the working- class. Racist arguments said colonialism, slavery and Black worker super-exploitation were a “civilising mission”. In truth, racism gave huge profits and power to the imperialist capitalist ruling- classes of Europe and Japan. These profits, and those extracted out of the European workers and peasants, were what capitalism was built on.

Racism in South Africa developed from colonial conquest, genocide against Khoisan people, and slavery in the Cape. The discovery of diamonds and gold in the 1870s strengthened racism.. Why? The mine bosses and capitalist farmers needed ultra- cheap labour to make profits. So the State forced Africans into wage labour through taxes and land dispossession. It also imported Indian semi- slaves for the sugar farms. Repressive systems such as the compounds, and a lack of political and union rights were used to keep African, Indian and Coloured labour cheap and controlled.

Many Africans were migrant labourers based in the homelands. This allowed the ruling class to keep their wages down (they did not have to pay a family wage) and to slow the development of volatile urban working- class ghettos (they were not allowed to settle in the cities). White workers and poor whites were deliberately divided from their Black comrades through massive racial privileges such as high wages, political and union rights, and social services. These privileges meant that most (but not all) of these workers were willing to defend racial capitalism.

Collapse of apartheid and the road to freedom

This system of racial capitalism worked well for the bosses up until the 1970s. It made huge profits and kept the masses down.. But the system entered a crisis in the 1970s. The local market was restricted to Whites and was thus too small for further capitalist growth. Also, massive skills shortages developed. Only Whites got a decent education and were allowed to do skilled work. More important, the Black workers and poor (joined by some middle- and upper- class elements)

rose in revolt: the 1973 Durban strikes, the Soweto rising of 1976, the emergence of a mass trade union and civic movement in the 1980s, the revolutionary uprisings of 1983–6, the mass protests of the late 1980s.

This crisis forced the racist ruling class to the negotiating table in 1990. The 1994 elections were a massive victory. For the first time in 350 years Black people are not ruled by a racist dictatorship. We have the right to vote, to free speech, to trade unions, to equal social services. We must defend these rights with mass action if necessary.

Capitalism and racism: one enemy, one fight

However, elections do not bring full freedom. The State always serves the ruling class, and parliamentary politics corrupts just about any politician. Even if politicians in the African National Congress (ANC) wished to destroy capitalism they would not be able to do so using the State. They cannot introduce any programmes (such as worker control of factories, and free or even adequate housing for the Black working class) which go against the interests of the ruling class. But the ANC's programmes are, in any case, pro-capitalist: land reform through the market, house building with bank loans, privatisation, sending police against strikers, evicting squatters, enforcing the payment of rent and service charges, lowering tariff rates, creating a "friendly investor climate". The majority of the new political elite have joined the old racist ruling-class by virtue of their wealth, expanding business operations, and role in defending capitalism. So we should boycott elections and rely on mass struggle to win change. We should not rely on our so-called "comrades in government" to defeat racism.

We believe that the fight against racism is a fight against capitalism and the State. These structures have always been built on racism, and always create new forms of racism. Yesterday, it was Apartheid. Today it is the arrest and deportation of so-called "illegal immigrants" from Africa. The immigrants are blamed for crime and unemployment, both of which are really the bosses' fault. The immigrants must be defended!

Black workers and poor people still suffer the legacy of Apartheid: poverty, rotten schools, landlessness, unemployment etc. These problems cannot be solved by the market. They require massive wealth redistribution, and an economy planned from below by the working-class to meet people's needs, not profits. In other words they can only be resolved under stateless socialist (Anarcho-Syndicalist) system.

This means that racism and its legacy will not be fully removed from society without a class struggle and a worker-peasant revolution.

Can Black workers and Black bosses unite?

All Black people are victims of racism. But the Black middle and upper class elite is shielded from the worst effects of racism by their privileged status in capitalism. They can live in the suburbs, go to private schools and earn big salaries- we can't. We must fight racism wherever it exists. But we working and poor people must not build alliances with Black managers and capitalists, because they will always choose profits over socialism. In fact they benefit from the exploitation of Black workers in their companies and state corporations, and they therefore defend the capitalist system and the State that caused racism. In objective terms, they are the allies of the White capitalists and State managers.

We workers create all social wealth. Only we can build a free society because only we do not exploit. Only a class- struggle can defeat the state, capitalism and oppression. And a class struggle means workers unity for workers power. The struggle in South Africa will centre on the African working-class. But other workers should be welcome to join- they will also benefit from Anarchism. With the removal of Apartheid privileges, it is possible that large sections of the White working class could join Black workers in struggle as reliable allies. We have already seen signs of this with the 1995 affiliation to COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) of the predominately White SASBO union (South African Society for Bank Officials).

It should be clear where we disagree with the various nationalist political parties such as the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO). Although we recognise that these groups were progressive in the anti-apartheid struggle, they are wrong on some key issues.

First, these groups think that change must come through taking control of the State, either through elections or armed struggle. But the State is part of the problem, not the solution. Second, they link that all Black people share the same basic interests and must unite into a nation. However, the Black workers and the poor have no common interests with the Black bosses and rulers. They are in a struggle with each other. The gap grows wider every day: the richest 20% of African households increased their real incomes by over 40% between 1975 and 1991, whilst the incomes of the poorest 40% of African households decreased by nearly 40% over the same period. The wealthiest 10% of African households have incomes over 60 times those of the poorest 10%, compared to ratios of roughly 30 times amongst Whites, Coloureds and Indians (SA figures, ca. 1996).

Do White workers benefit from racism?

Nationalists on the left, and racists on the right, often argue that White workers benefit from racism, and that it is therefore in their interests to defend discrimination.

In examining this issue, we must be careful to distinguish between different circumstances. In South Africa, which was a colony of White settlement, the small White working class received massive and real gains from Apartheid-capitalism. This was a deliberate tactic by the bosses to win support for capitalism. It was made possible by the economic boom that lasted until the 1970s. Today the bosses' system is less profitable, and they have been forced to abandon Apartheid- as a result they are no longer interested in winning the support of White workers. This means that White workers can no longer rely on racism, but will have to join with other workers or go under. The strength of racist ideas however means that this will be a slow process and it is possible that many White workers may never become progressive. Unity will only be possible on an anti-racist platform that addresses the interests of the Black majority of the working class.

In countries like Britain, Europe and the United States. the White working class forms the majority of the population. Although White workers in these countries may receive some short-term benefits from racism. such as slightly lower levels of unemployment and preferential access to the better jobs, these benefits are limited. White workers still make up the majority of the unemployed, the poor, and the workers in low-grade jobs. More importantly, racism has serious negative long-term consequences which outweigh these short-term gains. Racism divides and weakens working-class struggles. The result is a worse life for all workers. It is no accident that the USA, a country in which bosses have developed the tactic of "divide the races and rule",

has the weakest traditions of workers solidarity and union organising, and the worst welfare system of any Western country. Therefore, we fight for workers unity on an anti-racist basis as a necessary and immediate step towards the revolution in these countries.

Workers solidarity and unity is in the direct interest of the Black minorities in these countries. These minorities are, at the end of the day, too small and isolated to beat capitalism and racism on their own. They need allies. It is thus in the interests of all Western workers – White and Black – that these specially oppressed sections are drawn into the unions, and that the unions take up the fight against racism. It is essential that the support of the working class as a whole is won to anti-racist struggles. An injury to one is still an injury to all.

Immediate demands

However, although we believe in the need for revolution, the Workers Solidarity Federation does raise a number of immediate demands around these issues. We fight for land redistribution to the Black workers and the poor. We call for the upgrading of historically Black schools and an improved teacher-pupil ratio. We are for free education and democratic teaching methods in all sectors of education. We support the struggle to correct the inherited racial imbalances in tertiary education. We struggle to transform the universities and technikons into institutions run by the workers, students and staff which serve the needs of the working class, not the ruling class. We support affirmative action in White-dominated trades and professions. We are opposed to unequal wages between Black and White workers, and between skilled and unskilled workers. We are for improved training for Black workers. There should be a large-scale programme of house building, road building and electrification which also deals with the issue of unemployment. All attacks on immigrants, and attempts to divide immigrant from South African workers must be opposed.

THE TRADE UNIONS

We believe that the trade unions are the combat organisations of the working class. They were built to defend and advance workers interests against the bosses. There is no other way to explain the emergence of trade unions over the past few centuries other than as an expression of workers' need to band together against the bourgeoisie.

Even the most bureaucratic and reformist union must defend its members' interests or it will collapse. The unions have massive potential power because they can disrupt production, the source of the bosses wealth. They promote class consciousness, solidarity, and confidence because they organise people to fight as working class people against the bosses and rulers. Even the most "progressive" boss will oppose the unions because they are a challenge to his exploitation of workers. Even the most reformist union cannot be totally "incorporated" into capitalism because capitalism cannot satisfy the needs of workers.

The need to reform the trade unions

Therefore all trade unions are workers combat organisations in the class struggle. Obviously, this does not mean that the unions as they now exist are perfect- far from it! To a greater or a lesser

degree, most have a strong bureaucracy of paid officials and leaders. This group is better paid than ordinary workers and has many privileges. Because of these conditions they develop different interests to ordinary union members. Ordinary workers need to take action to improve their conditions, but bureaucrats want the unions to avoid struggles and spend their time negotiating with the bosses. Whole sections of the trade union bureaucracy have become outright defenders of the existing system. These leaders are not on the shopfloor anymore, and they forget what it is like. Often, these leaders take undemocratic decisions which are not in the best interests of the union members. For example, investing union money in capitalist companies and saying that this is “worker empowerment”!

We oppose the union bureaucracy because it undermines union struggle and because it is a threat to union democracy. For us the unions have to be made into real fighting organisations which are run and controlled by workers on the shopfloor. We do not think you can change the unions by capturing the full-time jobs at the top. Instead of leaving things to the leaders, we emphasise the need to democratise the unions. We promote maximum self-activity of the “ordinary” union members, and call for decision-making on the basis of mass meetings and the establishment of workplace-based shop-steward councils. We believe in building a rank and file movement which would embrace militant workers and shopstewards from different workplaces and areas of work. Its main function would be to encourage solidarity between all workers. It would be independent of any one political group, instead uniting militant unionists on class struggle issues. It would support all strikes, fight for the election of , and drastic reductions in the number of , all full-time officials so that they are responsible to the workers. It would fight for equal rights for women and ultimately resist any attempts by the bosses to make us pay for their crisis. The bureaucracy itself has to be torn down. The existence of a union bureaucracy is not inevitable. For example, the Spanish CNT, an explicitly Anarcho-Syndicalist trade union, had a million and a half members in the 1930s but only two (elected) full-time officials.

Practically all unions today are also dominated by backward reformist ideas , such as the notion that capitalism and the State can be changed to look after the needs of the workers and poor. Large union centres are commonly tied to supporting this or that Social-Democratic party, parties which in turn aim to co-manage capitalism and the State. Others are tied to Leninist or nationalist politics and parties. As we have indicated, none of these parties can save the masses as they are all focused around the authoritarian aim of taking State power. These ideas are typically as common amongst the rank- and- file as amongst the bureaucrats, and consequently, the political backwardness of the unions is not just a matter of union structure, leadership manoeuvrings etc.- it reflects also the political ideas common of many in the rank-and-file.

Clearly, we must reject these ideas and parliamentary links because we know capitalism and the State are based on putting the wealth and power of a minority of exploiters ahead of the needs of the workers and the poor. But we need to get these ideas across to the working-class, in opposition to nationalism, Social-Democracy or Leninism. Although the struggles of the working-class consistently bring it into objective conflict with capitalism, without a clear set of subjective understandings which encompass opposition to the State, capital, “authority”, and all forms of oppression as well as divisions in the working-class, the toiling masses will never take their destiny into their own hands. The working masses need both revolutionary industrial organisation and revolutionary ideas to build the new society. It is therefore essential that we spread Anarcho-Syndicalist ideas amongst the rank-and-file union members. It is essential that we relate these ideas to the daily concerns of the working class and working peasants.

To sum up: we need to deal with both issues- union bureaucracy and reformism; these strangle our class organisations. We must do two things if we want the unions to play a revolutionary role. First, get rid of the union bureaucracy and make sure that the unions are controlled by the membership. Second, win the union membership over to Anarcho- Syndicalist ideas.

Are splinter unions a way forward?

We do not think that either of these goals can be achieved by setting up splinter unions in each industry in opposition to the mainstream trade unions. We think that it is essential that we work within the existing trade unions. All unions are workers combat units. Leaving the mainstream unions to form new “pure” revolutionary unions has serious, negative, consequences. It withdraws militants from the unions, leaving them at the mercy of the bureaucrats and reformists. It isolates militants into tiny splinter unions because the masses of workers prefer to join the large, already existing unions. The radical slogans of the splinter unions can also alienate many ordinary workers who have not yet been won to revolutionary politics, and thus these unions remain small. The bosses also fight small radical unions to a standstill, whereas the mainstream unions have more freedom of manoeuvre. The argument that we must set up splinter unions also wrongly assumes that the union bureaucracy is invincible. But it is not. As a matter of fact, small groups of Anarcho-Syndicalist revolutionaries working inside the existing unions can achieve impressive results. For example the main French (CGT) and Argentinean (FORA) union federations were won to Anarcho-Syndicalist politics in this way in the early twentieth century.

Revolutionary general strike

We see the organised labour movement as an essential area of activity for revolutionaries. Politics have to be brought into the workplaces and unions as it is here that we have strength and can inflict real damage on the bosses. We must work in the unions to win the membership over to Anarcho-Syndicalism. We believe that if the bureaucracy is defeated and removed, and the union rank-and-file won over to our politics, the unions can play a leading role in the struggle against capitalism and the State. The unions can organise the workers to seize the factories, offices, farms and mines, and place them under direct workers control. We call this the revolutionary general strike in which workers take control of the economy. The unions must be transformed into the democratic workplace organisations that, in alliance with working-class community organisations and working peasant organisations, will be the battering ram of the revolution, and the basis for decision-making in the post-revolutionary society.

Building tomorrow today

In the immediate term, we think that the unions should broke all alliances with political parties that seek State power. We are opposed to all laws that restrict the right to strike or interfere in internal union affairs. We oppose all attempts at union bashing by the bosses. We are opposed to the presence of the police union, POPCRU (Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union) in COSATU because the police are not workers, they are the repressive arm of the State. We are for a national minimum wage, and for the creation of well paid and social useful jobs. We oppose all productivity deals that bring job losses. We are links between the trade unions and the unemployed. Women must have equal rights and benefits in the unions and in the workplace. We are for six

months paid maternity leave with no job loss. The unions must combat all workplace racism but also raise demands that unite all workers. We fight for full union democracy and a reduction in the number of full-time officials to the absolute minimum. All posts should be elected. All strikes should be automatically made official so long as they do not contradict trade union principles. We call for the merger of the unions to form one-union-one-industry, and a super-federation embracing all the trade unions.

We call for the withdrawal of the unions from all “worker participation” and “joint decision-making” schemes that are designed to get the unions to work alongside the bosses and the State to manage the capitalist economy. This includes the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC). Such schemes are a trick that hide the rule of the bosses, and the class struggle between the masses and capitalism and the State. These schemes undermine trade union independence by getting the union leaders to help manage capitalism. They increase bureaucracy and undemocratic practices in the unions because they require very centralised unions and decision-making by “experts”. And they provide workers with absolutely no material benefits; instead, it is workers who bear the costs of “economic restructuring” such as job losses, wage freezes and an intensified pace of work which are typically agreed to in such forums.

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Although we argue that only the working class, working peasants and the poor can make the revolution, we do support the struggle of the students to transform the institutions of higher learning (the universities and technikons) despite the fact that such institutions typically train people for middle class jobs. We do so because we believe that the student struggle is progressive, because we are anti-racist, because working class and poor students are the main victims of the problems that exist in higher education, because we stand for the principle of free, democratic and open education for all, and because we want to recruit student militants to Anarcho-Syndicalist politics.

Historically, the universities and technikons have been characterised by massive racist inequalities. First, in the form of open segregation up until 1991 between “historically white” and “historically black” institutions. Secondly, in the form of racial discrimination within specific institutions: a lack of funding for Black students which perpetuates the inequalities of the past by financially excluding needy students; racism by some staff; inadequate academic support programmes to attack the legacy of “Bantu Education”; predominantly White administrative councils inherited from the past; racist violence by reactionary White students etc. These inequalities are the direct result of Apartheid- capitalism.

But the ANC-led government has done little to challenge the legacy of the past. For example, it has refused to openly support the student struggles. Instead, it has condemned “student trouble-makers” and sent the police to attack protesters in a large number of cases. It has failed to make adequate bursaries and subsidies available to promote change, and is even planning to cut funds further! In fact, the South African is among five countries that spend the least on higher education in the whole world!

The effect of these practices is to reserve higher education for the rich. They must be challenged by the student movement.

Student-worker alliances

But the student movement cannot win on its own. Students come from a variety of backgrounds, and are only in the institutions of higher learning for a few years. This means that the student movement is unstable, because its membership is very varied, and because older activists are always leaving the movement. In addition, students are not involved in the production process, and therefore lack the structural power to launch a sustained attack on the systems of resource distribution (capitalism) and repression (the State) that perpetuate the problems Black students in general, and Black students from working class backgrounds in particular, face. The university is not an island, and isolated struggles cannot transform the system of higher education as a whole.

It is vital, then, that students build links with organised workers both on and off campus. Workers in the tertiary education sector, especially those in the lower grades, face similar problems to the students. Their jobs are badly paid and insecure, they face shopfloor racism, and they are being attacked through systems of “sub-contracting” and “flexible work” that undermine worker conditions and incomes. The tertiary education sector has very repressive labour relations. Workers and staff in higher grades, and even sections of the middle class itself (the academics) also face these issues.

There is thus a basis and a need for the building of a worker-student alliance. It is the workers who sustain the universities and technikons. It is the workers who have the power to defeat the bosses and rulers, both on and off campus.

But we insist that any student-worker alliance must serve the direct interests of workers. In the short-term, we oppose any “alliance” that manipulates the workers to win student demands, and then fails to come to the support of the workers. If students do not support the workers, the alliance must break. We should also try to bring staff associations and unions- such as those amongst academics- into the alliance. This will be facilitated by the fact that most staff are either directly working class (such as white collar workers) or from those parts of the middle-class whose conditions of work are the most similar to those of workers (teaching staff, technical specialists etc. work for wages, often do productive work, and typically lack overall control over the work process (as opposed to the small business capitalists and middle management who make up the rest of the middle class)).

Fight for a Workers’ University

In the long-term, we argue that the current nature of the higher education system, as it now exists, must be fundamentally transformed. At the moment, higher education often serves to train experts and managers who are hired by the bosses to help run capitalism by providing knowledge, skills and staff. Through the revolution, the institutions of higher learning must be transformed into Worker Universities: centres of learning and training that serve the needs of the workers and the poor, that help produce mass housing, not shopping malls, that train medical staff for popular health programmes, not private hospitals etc. Instead of universities and technikons being run from above by overpaid, bureaucratic elites, we call for genuine worker-student-staff over these institutions. The basis for this change will be worker, student and staff organisations taking control over the institutions and removing the ruling councils.

Mobilise now

In order to work towards these goals- a student-worker alliance and a Workers University- we raise the following issues. We are for student solidarity with workers struggles both on and off campus. We are opposed to any and all attacks on workers conditions in the tertiary sector.

We are for the breaking of alliances between student organisations and political parties in government such as the SASCO-ANC alliance because such alliances hamper the ability of the organised students to effectively fight for student demands. We are for the formation of broad “transformation fronts” of student organisations aligned to different political parties (SASCO, PASO, AZASCO etc.) as a transitional step towards the formation of a country-wide Black-centred Student Union independent of political parties. We are opposed all funding cuts, and argue instead for increased spending on all levels of education in order to remove the legacy of Apartheid. We call for an extension of academic support programmes. We raise the demand of free, democratic and equal education for all as a basic principle. We oppose all manifestations of racism, and defend affirmative action programmes.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is always a direct effect of living under capitalism, it is used by the bosses to depress wages “there are plenty of people out there who work for less money than you” is a common threat as is “behave yourselves or I’ll close down”. as we saw above, the chaotic nature of capitalism also leads to regular crises and attacks on workers which cause massive unemployment. This is especially true of South Africa where the crisis of the racist capitalist system has caused massive job losses. Elsewhere in Africa, the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, which was caused by recession in the imperialist world capitalist system and by the mismanagement of the economy by the ruling class, has led to ESAPs and job losses.

Unemployment will not be stopped while the capitalist system exists but there are immediate demands that can be put forward. Any workplace threatened with closure should be occupied. The workers should demand continued employment whether it be under a new owner or by nationalisation. We believe it makes little difference because, for us, nationalisation is not a cure-all. It is no guarantee of better wages or job security and it does not bring us any nearer to socialism. There is no essential difference between a boss who is a civil servant and one who is a private employer. However, we oppose all privatisation that leads to job losses, worse working conditions or less services for the mass of the people. We also call for a shorter working week, an end to systematic overtime and double jobbing and an end to all productivity deals. Basic wages should be high enough so that workers do not need to work excess hours.

We believe that the unemployed should accept no responsibility for the situation. Unemployment payments should be increased substantially. Where possible, the unemployed should organise themselves to defend their rights and link up with the broader trade union movement.. We think that the employed and the unemployed have basically the same interests, and these are to resist the ruling class which oppresses them.

HOUSING AND SQUATTING

The housing crisis in South Africa is massive. About a fifth of the population live in squatter camps. Millions more live in broken down hostels, or in overcrowded formal housing. By contrast, the rich live it up in houses which are far too large for their needs.

The housing crisis also reflects the effects of capitalism and the State, particularly in their brutal Apartheid form. Low-cost urban housing was deliberately neglected by the State in the 1960s and 1970s. The aim was to prevent African people from settling in the cities, the idea was that African workers' "real" homes were in the homelands and that they were thus just temporary visitors to the towns and did not "need" proper housing. Secondly, the collapse of the peasant economies of the homelands sent millions fleeing from rural devastation to try get a better life in the city. This crisis was largely due to the racist and unjust land reservation system which gave 87% of the land to White capitalist farmers, and the migrant labour system which drained labour off the land. At the same time, the capitalist farmers have been replacing farmworkers with machines such as combine harvesters (provided cheaply by the State) and, as a result, evicting further numbers of people.

When the pass laws were abolished in 1986, these people were able to come to the cities, but the State and capital have consistently not provided adequate housing. Reason one is profit: the companies do not want to spend their money on providing basic facilities to the unprofitable poor, whilst the State does not want to increase taxes on the companies to fund a housing programme. In addition, three other factors come into play: firstly, under capitalism, the right to private property is seen by those in power as more important than the right to life, and thus squatters are typically chased off the land by the police if they are residing in defiance of some blood-soaked (colonially derived) land deed; second, the State always panders to the rich, and thus is happy to evict the poor when they live near the rich, and maybe affect property values; thirdly, the State is an inefficient bureaucratic monstrosity that is quite effective at deploying police, defending capitalism etc., but hopeless when it comes to providing for the basic needs of the masses. Instead, much of the (already inadequate) money gets "eaten up" by the bureaucracy, consultants, corrupt officials and so on.

In terms of immediate demands, we support squatting, land invasions and take-overs of unused buildings. Also important, however, would be to take mass action to put pressure on the bosses and rulers to provide housing. This housing should be of a decent quality, should provide jobs for local people such as the homeless, and should meet the needs of the people concerned. In the course of such struggles and actions, it is important to build links between squatters and other sections of the workers and the poor such as unions in the workplace, and working-class people in formal housing.

We also argue that the issue of homelessness needs to be linked up to other popular demands such as lower rents and the struggle against unemployment. Building these links is important because it prevents the struggles of the homeless from being isolated and picked off one by one, because it links squatters to the power of the organised working class in the workplace, and because it makes it difficult for the bosses and the rulers to divide and rule the class by playing off squatters against other workers (something which has already happened). Ultimately, however, we do not think that the housing question can be fully solved under the current system.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The world is facing a very serious environmental crisis. Key environmental problems include air pollution, the destruction of the ozone layer, vast quantities of toxic waste, massive levels of soil erosion, the possible exhaustion of key natural resources such as oil and coal, and the extinction of plants and animals on a scale not seen since the death of the dinosaurs 60 million years ago. We think that this crisis is likely to have catastrophic effects in the future. Even today, the negative effects of the crisis are evident in the form of growing deserts, increased rates of cancer, and the loss of plant species which could hold out cures for diseases for diseases such as AIDS etc.

What caused the crisis?

We disagree with those environmentalists who blame the crisis on modern machine production. Many dangerous, environmentally destructive technologies and substances (for example, coal power stations, non-degradable plastics which do not rot in the ground) can be replaced with safer and sustainable industrial technologies (for example, solar technology, starch-based plastics). We think that modern forms of production have many potential advantages over small-scale craft production. Such as greatly increasing the number of essential products like bricks produced, and freeing people from unpleasant toil. We also disagree with the argument that says that workers and peasants cause the crisis by consuming “too many” resources. Most goods consumed in the world are consumed by the middle class and ruling class.

Instead, the real blame for the environmental crisis must be laid at the door of capitalism and the State. These structures create massive levels of inequality which are responsible for much ecological devastation. How? The accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the few is associated with excessive and unjustifiable high levels of consumption by the ruling elite. The poverty caused by the system also creates environmental problems. For example, by forcing the poor to cut down trees for firewood, exhaust the tiny bits of farm land that they own in a desperate attempt to provide food, pollute rivers because they lack proper plumbing facilities etc.

Capitalists also build many goods to break as soon as possible (forcing people to buy replacements), thus resulting in unnecessary waste. Many goods that are produced are deliberately destroyed in order to keep prices up, such as the 200 million tons of grain stockpiled world-wide in 1991. 3 million tons could have eliminated all famine in Africa that year. Capitalists have developed safe, alternative technologies, which can replace environmentally destructive processes and substances. But they do not want to install these new technologies, or even proper safety and monitoring equipment, because this costs money and cuts into profits. They prefer to leave ordinary people to suffer pollution. Capitalists also promote inefficient and resource-wasting products in place of those which are more suited to sustaining the environment. For example, they promote private car ownership (which consumes massive amounts of petrol per person), in place of public transport systems (which minimise fuel consumption).

The State defends and supports these practices. It does not want to impose strong environmental protection laws in case this hampers profit-making. In addition, the military activities of the State are a major cause of the environmental crisis. Massive amounts of resources are wasted on the building the repressive arm of the State: world-wide, about \$900 billion dollars is spent on the military every year. Weapons such as nuclear bombs have been developed which are capable of destroying all life on earth. Often, the knowledge acquired in making these weapons is applied

to industry, resulting in very dangerous technologies such as nuclear power (from research on nuclear bombs), and pesticides (from research on chemical weapons).

Working people, unions and the environment

We think that environmental issues are directly relevant to working class, poor and working peasant people. These oppressed classes are the main victims of the environmental crisis. It is the workers who have to work in the factories that spew out toxic waste, who have to spray the pesticides which poison the land and water. It is the communities of the poor which are built next to the polluting industrial areas. It is the working peasantry whose land is destroyed by soil erosion. The environment is not just the veld and the wild animals, it is also where people live and work. A safe environment is thus a basic need for the masses. Only the masses have a direct and immediate interest in fighting against the environmental crisis: the ruling class benefits directly from the capitalist and State system which caused the crisis, and is able to shield itself from many environmental hazards in its luxury suburbs and air-conditioned boardrooms.

We therefore think that the way the environmental crisis must be dealt with in a class-struggle manner. Clearly, capitalism and the State are by their very nature destructive of the environment, and are thus a potential threat to the very survival of life on Earth. It is only the working masses, who are the main victims of the crisis, and who are the only force capable of defeating the ruling class, which can halt the environmental crisis.

In fact, because most environmental damage takes place at the point of production (for example due to dangerous technologies, poor plant maintenance, hazardous operating procedures, and poor worker training), the powerful trade unions can play the key role in fighting for the environment in the here-and-now. We have already seen in this in South Africa where the Chemical Workers Industrial Union organised against the importation of toxic waste by Thor Chemicals. In the long-term, the trade unions can move beyond just defending the environment to saving it, by taking over the factories, farms and mines and introducing safe technologies.

A worker-peasant revolution will help the environment in several ways. It will remove capitalism and the State, the main cause of the problems. It will eliminate the wasteful and excessive consumption of the rich. It will redistribute the land and end poverty. It will restructure production in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Resist!

In the immediate term, the Workers Solidarity Federation argues for workers in polluting factories to enforce safety rules and monitor pollution. We support actions by workers and communities to reduce and stop pollution. Where factories cannot be made safe, they should be closed down, but their workers should get re-employed at the same pay and skill levels in the same area. The environmental question needs to be related to the issue of land redistribution by pointing to how the legacy of racist land allocation in South Africa has resulted in the ecological devastation of the homelands.

While we think that nature reserves should be retained, we recognise that such reserves were often set up under Apartheid at the cost of poor communities, resulting in much bitterness. Therefore we call for these communities to have some access to grazing, dry wood and other resources.

We think that local communities should receive a portion of the reserve's earnings. We call for the unionisation of workers at such facilities.

We oppose all testing of atomic, biological and chemical weapons in all circumstances and support direct action and union campaigns against these tests. We oppose the testing of medicines and other products on animals. These practices are unnecessarily cruel, and scientifically flawed as results obtained on one species (e.g. cats) are not applicable to other species (e.g. humans). It is the oppressed classes who suffer the effects of exposure to unsafe medicines.

We call for strike action against companies "strip mining" forests, in order to force them to reforest and manage extraction. This preserves both jobs and the environment. We call on unions to establish their own environmental monitoring systems, and to publicise and organise actions against companies that expose workers and the community at large to toxic substances, pollution etc. Within unions, we raise the issue of pressurising industry to use recycled products where necessary and to find alternatives for products or by-products that harm the environment. This should be backed by industrial action.

WOMEN'S FREEDOM

We believe that women are oppressed as a sex. They are denied equal rights, such as the right to control their own fertility and the right to equal pay for equal work. They have been assigned the role of cooks and child minders, their place is said to be in the home.

Women's freedom and the class struggle

We believe that the root of women's oppression lies in the division of society into classes, and the economic and social relationships that this created. By giving women the worst work, with no job security, the bosses create a super-cheap workforce which they can hire or fire at will. Cheap women workers can be used as a threat against men workers, and as a way for bosses to increase their profits by cutting down the wage bill. Because women have no real job security they are often fired when they get pregnant, meaning the bosses do not have to pay extra benefits or maternity leave.

Women's unpaid work in the household supplies the bosses with the next generation of workers at no extra cost, as women are doing the cooking, cleaning and child rearing for free. They also take care of the sick and the elderly in the same way. The bosses say that women's low wages are justified because men are the "breadwinners" in the family. But most working-class women do the housework as well as join the workforce. In this way, they work a "double shift" at great personal cost. Women's low wages often keep them trapped in abusive and oppressive relationships. The bosses' media is a key cause of such situations, because it promotes hateful and exploitative images of women, which say that women exist to be used and abused. Some men believe these lies because of their frustrations from oppression at work or unemployment out on their families and other women. Of course, this does not make such behaviour acceptable, as such actions are intolerable. But these factors show that sexist behaviour by men is rooted in conditions under capitalism, not in men's hormones or biological nature, as the ruling class claims.

So we recognise that while ordinary men may play a role in women's oppression, they are not the primary cause of the problem. The problem can only be properly dealt with by both challenging men's sexist behaviour (which divides the masses and is unjust), and by challenging the sexist structures of the capitalist system. We do not deny that ordinary men may gain from women's oppression in the short-term in the sense that they may have a feeling of "superiority" to women, or have a slightly lower rate of unemployment or better-paid jobs. But in the long-term, women's oppression has disastrous results for men. It divides workers' struggles. It results in lower overall family incomes and lower job security for all. It creates personal unhappiness.

We recognise that all women suffer oppression. But wealthy women have access to maids, lawyers and so on which enables them to "buy" their way out of a lot of the misery that ordinary women face. In fact, these women are part of the problem as they defend capitalism and the State because it is their own class interests. We thus believe that for women to be really free we have to smash capitalism and build a society based on Anarcho-Syndicalism on a class-struggle basis. We disagree with those feminists who think that all you have to do is for women to become bosses and politicians to achieve equality. We want to destroy the existing power structures.

Separate organisations?

Women's oppression is not purely a struggle for women as it is a working class issue but we do defend women's right to organise separately in women-only organisations. This is because we recognise that it is women who actually suffer sexism, and because we support the democratic right of free association.

But this does not mean that we promote such organisations as the way forward. On the contrary, while we recognise that people may see such organisations as necessary in specific circumstances, we also know that this strategy has many weaknesses. Firstly, we think that separate organisations are almost always a bad idea in the workplace because successful trade union action relies on the unity of the workers. Small women-only workplace groups are usually too weak to win against the bosses on their own, and they can even act to undermine and destroy existing unions if they call on women to leave the existing unions. There are cases where separate organisations have been used to undermine workers' unity and struggle. Secondly, separate organisation often lends itself to the formation of multi-class alliances as it prioritises non-class identities (like womanhood) over class identity. In other words, it runs the risk of building alliances between working class and ruling class women. Thirdly, women need allies in the fight against women's oppression in order to strengthen their demands. They need to have maximum support from other working and poor people if they are to win real concessions from the bosses and rulers. They also need to win men over to anti-sexist views. Women's concerns should not be isolated in women-only groups, or left to the "women's section"- these are issues of relevance to all working class people. Given that women's oppression is not in the real interests of working class men, a basis for fighting unity around these demands already exists.

So while we defend the right of separate organisation, we do not endorse it. Having said that, however, we do recognise that it may be necessary to set up committees and structures in the unions and other working-class organisations to promote work amongst women and a focus on women's specific concerns. These sections or wings of the broader working-class movement can help make sure that women's concerns are not marginalised and also develop women's political confidence. However, we think that these sections must be based on the principles of class struggle.

gle (be specifically working-class), and build alliances with other movements of the workers, the poor and the working peasants. Without allies, such movements are too small and too weak to defeat the bosses and the rulers. We think it is up to these sections to decide whether they should allow men to join as well, or just recruit women.

Very often the priorities of the women's movement have reflected the fact that it largely dominated by middle-class women. We believe that it must become more relevant to working class women. Our priorities are those issues which immediately affect thousands of working class women e.g. work, childcare, housing, etc. We must fight for equal pay for equal work, for women's access to jobs that are traditionally denied to them, for job security for women, for free 24 childcare funded by the bosses and the State where women demand it, for paid maternity leave and guaranteed re-employment, and an end to all violence against women. We also think that it is only right that men do a fair share of the housework. We are for women having an equal right to all positions of "leadership" in mass organisations.

For these demands to be won as many working class women as possible must be drawn into the struggle against sexism, capitalism and the State. In campaigns to win these demands our emphasis is on building in workplaces and in the townships where women are directly affected. All progressive men must support (but not try to dominate) these struggles.

WOMEN'S SEXUALITY AND GAY RIGHTS

We believe in the right of women to control their own fertility. Women must be free to decide to have children or not, how many and when. Thus we believe in the right to free contraception. Thus we support abortion on demand.

We also believe that all consenting adults should have the right to engage in the sexual practices and relationships that make them happy, and we therefore oppose the oppression of gays and lesbians. We do not accept the argument that gay and lesbian activity is "unnatural", because such behaviour has always existed in all societies. This includes Africa, contrary to the claims of bourgeois nationalists who pretend otherwise.

The oppression of gays and lesbians, just like the oppression of women, is rooted in the nature of capitalist society and the ideas it promotes. As we discussed above, capitalism relies heavily on the heterosexual family which provides care for the workers, the sick, the elderly and the next generation of workers. The hostility towards gays and lesbians stems from the challenge that their sexuality poses to the idea that this is the only possible form of family. Clearly, it undermines the idea that sex is only for reproduction. Homosexuals are condemned as "unnatural" because their sexual activity cannot produce children. Promoting hatred of gays and lesbians ("homophobia") is also a very effective way of dividing and ruling the workers and the poor. Personal freedom in the area of sexual preference is tightly controlled under capitalism and the State, with laws in almost all countries defining what forms of adult sex are and are not acceptable.

For these reasons, we do not think that the way to defeat gay and lesbian oppression is by promoting gay "business power" or by uniting all classes of the "gay community". The presence of capitalists in the gay movement is a serious problem. We think that the fight must be linked to the class struggle against capitalism and the State, and we think that all progressive forces should support gays' and lesbians' right to equality. In immediate terms, we must raise the issue of fighting against discrimination on the job, in our trade unions. An end to harassment must

be demanded. Stereotyping and anti-gay attitudes must be challenged everywhere. We support physical self-defence by lesbians and gays against gay bashers and the police where necessary. We reject the right of the State to dictate the sexual choices of consenting adults. We support progressive initiatives of the gay movement such as Gay Pride marches, the scrapping of anti-gays laws and anti-discrimination campaigns. We also think that links must be built with other working class campaigns.

BREAKING IMPERIALISM'S CHAINS

By imperialism we mean a situation of external domination where the ruling class of one country dominates the people and territory of another country. The key imperialist powers are the Western States (USA, West Europe, Japan) and their ruling classes, and the dominant States of the former "Soviet bloc" (Russia and China).

Roots of imperialism

Imperialism has been a central part of capitalism and the modern State since these structures of oppression emerged 500 years ago. Two factors account for this. Firstly, the imperialist ruling classes wanted to obtain cheap labour and raw materials and new markets for manufactured goods in the Third World (Africa, South Asia, Latin America, Middle East, East Europe). Secondly, the Western States and their ruling classes competed with one another for territory and strategic advantage (such as keeping rival ruling classes away from cheap minerals).

Imperialism before World War Two

The first phase of modern imperialism was "merchant capitalism". This was the period opened up by the conquest of the Americas. The capitalist ruling class of the West got its wealth through plunder, trade, slave plantations and the exploiting of European peasants and artisans. Merchant capitalism overlapped with a second imperialist phase, "colonialism", in which Western states established direct rule over Third World areas like Africa.

The consequences of imperialism in all these phases were overwhelmingly negative, involving genocide against indigenous peoples, slavery, racism, war, increased food insecurity, poverty and oppression.

Collapse of the colonial empires

The old colonial empires collapsed after 1945 period due to the weaknesses of the key imperial powers, pressure from the USA for access to these territories, and massive colonial revolts.

But while the destruction of the empires was an advance, the anti-colonial movements failed in an important way: power did not pass to the working and poor people who made up the majority of the Third World population, but to local capitalist ruling classes. This failure has very concrete roots in the nationalist politics that dominated most of the anti-colonial revolts (see below). At the same time, external domination continued in the Third World despite the attainment of formally independent States.

Imperialism today

Imperialism did not end with the collapse of the empires. The USA became the main imperialist power after 1945. It sought to expand its economic and military influence through alliances like NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) in order to halt the expansion of the rival imperialist blocs of the so-called “socialist” (in reality, State-capitalist) countries of the Soviet Union and China. All these imperialist powers repeatedly used military force to secure their interests in the Third World: examples are Nicaragua (US intervention) and Afghanistan (Soviet intervention).

Relations between the key imperialist powers are partly regulated by the United Nations, which is an imperialist-dominated congress of self-seeking Western and Third World ruling classes. It is not a peacekeeper!

Huge multi-national corporations (MNCs) like Shell came to dominate world trade, investment, research, and wealth after 1945. MNC’s power allows them to maintain exploitative colonial trade patterns in which Third World countries sell underpriced raw materials to Western companies who in turn charge monopoly prices for manufactured goods. MNCs do invest in Third World countries, but they send most of their profits back to their head offices (instead of reinvesting it locally); undermine efficient local job-creating industries with machinery and imports with few linkages to the local economy; and use cheap, repressed, local labour. In other words, MNCs are part and parcel of the imperialist system in its post-World War Two phase.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are also imperialist structures. These institutions support right-wing Third World governments (for example, South Africa in 1976). Their policies reinforce the unequal exchange trade patterns inherited from colonialism by promoting reliance on the primary sector (raw materials), and also aid MNC activities by promoting free trade and capital movements. Their weapons are the promotion of free market ideas and the insistence that Third World countries wanting loans adopt a set of neo-liberal/free market policies called Economic Structural Adjustment (ESAP). ESAP calls for: promotion of raw material production; trade liberalisation; and a reduced State role in the economy (meaning privatisation, massive cuts in welfare and public sector jobs).

Why nationalism fails

Imperialism casts a shadow over Third World working and poor people, so what strategy can fight it?

One strategy is progressive “nationalism”, supported by organisations like the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) and IRA (Irish Republican Army). These groups argue that all classes in a given “nation” must unite to achieve self-determination through an independent State.

Although progressive, anti-imperialist nationalism cannot defeat imperialism. Nationalism delivers power to local ruling classes as it relies on taking State power. The State is a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure of coercion that always defends capitalism and concentrates power in the hands of a small ruling class. As a result, the State cannot deliver freedom to the workers and peasants. Nationalism hides class differences within the “nation” by arguing that all people must unite around their supposedly common interests, when in fact they have nothing in common. Its function is to build a mass support base for local elites angry with imperialism for blocking their ambitions to rule and exploit.

The enemy is at home

Although Third World elites may use anti-imperialist language, they cannot challenge imperialism once they hijack the anti-imperialist struggle to take power. Nationalists fail to realise that imperialism's international power, in the form of Western militaries, the UN, the IMF and World Bank, and MNCs, means that it is impossible for any one country to pursue an independent path. Those who try are stamped on hard, like Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991.

Third World ruling classes are objectively allies of imperialism as their interests are mostly identical. They rely on the imperialist economic relationships for their wealth, and on Western ruling classes' military aid to crush worker-peasant resistance to the exploitation and repression this entails. For their part, imperialist ruling classes support these local elites as they help manage imperialism and capitalism.

Conflicts do sometimes arise between Third World and Western ruling classes. For example, local elites may resent the restrictions of imperialism and try to take an independent capitalist development path, for example, by nationalising MNC property. However, although imperialists intervene against these renegades, the real source of conflict between the two groups is over how to manage capitalism and the State, not about whether or not to keep them. Both sides support these structures and agree on the need to repress the working masses. Nationalisation is not socialism but only a transfer of property from company bureaucrats to State bureaucrats. Where a genuine worker-peasant revolt breaks out, the two elites drop their differences and unite against their common enemy, the workers and peasants.

Path of class struggle

There is another way, Anarcho-Syndicalism. Since imperialism is rooted in capitalism and the State, we argue that the anti-imperialist struggle can only be successful if it is also a struggle against these structures. And these structures can only be destroyed by class struggle as only the workers and peasants are capable of building a free society as only they do not need to exploit, and have no vested interest in the current system.

Since an isolated anti-imperialist struggle or revolution cannot win, a successful struggle requires maximum international support and solidarity. The worker-peasant revolution must spread into other territories dominated by imperialism and also into the imperialist countries. The true allies of the Third World toiling masses are the Western working classes, not the exploiting local elites who hijack power. These Western working classes do not benefit from imperialism as it strengthens the repressive power of their own rulers, wastes resources and lives on the military, promotes reactionary ideas that divides the workers (like racism), and allows MNCs to cut jobs and wages by the shifting operations to repressive Third World countries.

The revolution aims to establish an international stateless socialist system based on equality and worker-peasant self-management through federations of workplace and community councils. Such a system will allow all people full self-determination and the right to express their various cultures and ways of life.

For international solidarity and revolutionary resistance

In order to work towards this final victory, we must join anti-imperialist struggles as we support their immediate aims, as campaigning gives people confidence in struggle, and out of working

class solidarity. It is in struggle that people are won to revolutionary ideas, and so we must link these daily struggles to our vision of a free society. Overall, we oppose all imperialist interventions (including those of the UN), as they are part of the problem, not the solution. Any imperialist-brokered settlement will have as its primary aim the preservation of ruling class power. We are for the unconditional withdrawal of imperialist troops from any occupations.

We are opposed to all imperialist wars, but we do not side with Third World elites when they clash with imperialist powers. Instead, we call for solidarity with, and victory to, the working and poor people of that country, who are, after all, the main victims of any conflict. We make this concrete by offering solidarity including material aid to independent working class and working peasant and anti-authoritarian organisations. We call on First World workers to oppose the interventions. We defend all progressive independence movements and progressive forces (including nationalists) in their battles with oppression. We defend the right of ordinary people to choose to have an independent State and/or secede from an empire. We demand the liberation of all colonies and sites of imperial oppression, and oppose all attacks on secessionist movements.

We welcome local defeats for imperialism as they give confidence to working class struggles in the imperialist countries and as they encourage anti-imperialist struggles in other countries. At the same time, however, we are forced to recognise that any defeat of imperialism that does not have Anarchist/Syndicalist goals will not be ultimately succeed. In countries where nationalist movements do come to power our role is not to support them but rather to organise for a revolution that will place power in the hands of the working class and working peasantry.

We are opposed to ESAP policies, not because they are “technically faulty” but because they hurt ordinary people. Class struggle is the key to defending and advancing the conditions and rights of working and poor people in this situation. We are for an international minimum wage and international working class unity. If capitalism is global, the workers struggle must become global as well. The way to defeat MNC manipulation of different national wage rates in order to attack workers is not protectionism against cheap imports or surrender to the demands of capital, it is international unity in support of basic worker and consumer living standards across the world. We therefore support all initiatives at international trade union unity. We are for solidarity strikes between workers in different countries in general, and for solidarity action and trade union unity between workers employed by the same MNC in different countries in particular.

Part 3: Anarcho-Syndicalism in Action

You probably agree that what you have read so far are mostly good ideas. You probably accept that the wealth of society should be distributed equally and also that ordinary people should have more say in the running of their lives. Like many people who hear about Anarcho-Syndicalism you may believe that it is a good set of ideas but unfortunately it would never work. That people are naturally greedy and selfish, if there was no government to look after our interests there would be “complete chaos”.

It has already been stated that we believe capitalism is chaos. It does not and never can meet the needs of ordinary people. On the other hand, a society run by those who actually produce (the working class and working peasants) can. This kind of society is not myth we have dreamed up. At various stages of our history it has become a reality. Working people have taken their destinies into their own hands and made a success of it. Far from being naturally greedy and selfish these experiences actually show that given the right conditions people can co-operate and act in a spirit of mutual aid.

IN THE BEGINNING

As Anarcho-Syndicalists we trace our tradition back to the first International Workers Association in the 1870s where the Anarchist/Syndicalists formed a distinct tendency influenced mainly by the ideas of Michael Bakunin¹. Some of the main branches of the First International were Anarcho-Syndicalist in orientation. Since then Anarcho-Syndicalism has always been deeply rooted in the working class and working peasantry. We do not spend their time plotting in back rooms. For us our activity means bringing our politics into the daily struggles of the factories, the offices and the communities.

Anarchists/ Syndicalists have been involved in most major modern revolutions They have been there arguing and fighting for the right and necessity of working people running society as opposed to any so- called Marxist or “socialist party” or bureaucratic or nationalist elite. Anarcho-Syndicalism has historically had a massive impact on the struggles of workers, working peasants and the poor. In fact, May Day, the international workers day, was begun in the 1880s to commemorate the framing and execution of 8 Anarcho-Syndicalists in the USA. Called the “Haymarket Martyrs”, these comrades were legally murdered after they played a central role in organising the 1886 general strike for a 8 hour day which brought out tens of thousands of Black and White workers. In Chicago, the Anarcho-Syndicalist -oriented Central Labour Union, in which many of the Martyrs were key activists, brought out 65,000 workers.

In fact, our ideas dominated the revolutionary left across the world in the early twentieth-century. And in the first half of the twentieth century, Anarcho-Syndicalism was at one point

¹ For overviews of Bakunin’s ideas, see ACF, Basic Bakunin, and R.B. Saltman, The Social and Political Thought of Micheal Bakunin. Many of Bakunin’s writings are collected in Sam Dolgoff (ed.), Bakunin on Anarchism.

or another the main political influence on the trade unions of many countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, France, Mexico, Paraguay, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay. There were strong Anarcho-Syndicalist minority union currents in countries such as Britain, Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the USA . Not that these “minorities” were small: the Italian Anarcho-Syndicalist unionists numbered over 800, 000 in 1920! Other Anarcho-Syndicalist movements of varying sizes and influence existed throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, South and East Asia, parts of Africa, and in Europe and North America.

Almost the entire Anarcho-Syndicalist movement opposed the imperialist First World War, suffering bannings, detentions and deportations. The Anarcho-Syndicalist movement played a central part in the revolutionary wave of workers struggles that took place from 1917–22 , launching near revolutions in many countries, such as Spain, Argentina and Italy. They were central to the fight against the rise of fascism in Europe, Latin America and Japan. They realised that the Russian Revolution of 1917 (see below) had been destroyed by the Communist Party which built State capitalism and one-party dictatorship on the bones of the masses. Anarcho- Syndicalists also played an important role in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles across the world, including those in China, Cuba, Ireland, Korea, Macedonia, Mexico and Nicaragua. In South Africa, Anarcho-Syndicalists were central to the formation of the country’s first radical Black-centred trade union movement, the Industrial Workers of Africa, in 1917.

From the start, Anarcho-Syndicalism has everywhere consistently fought against exploitation, authoritarianism , colonialism, environmental destruction, racism, sexism and the oppression of gays and lesbians. Anarcho- Syndicalism was weakened by the rise of fascism and Communism in the 1920s and 1930s, but the movement has strongly re-emerged across the world since the 1970s. In Spain and Sweden, tens of thousands of workers are currently organised in revolutionary trade unions. In Nigeria, the Awareness League (AL) was organised in 1989. Its Charter states that it is “inspired by, and committed to the ideals, principals, objectives, goals, ends and purposes of anarcho- syndicalism”. The AL is active in the struggle against the military regime. Anarcho-Syndicalism continues to grow in influence in countries as diverse as Venezuela, Turkey, Japan and Ireland.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION²

“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

² Unless otherwise stated, all figures cited in this section are from the articles in H. Shukman (editor), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the Russian Revolution*. See pp. 29, 166,175,177, 182, 184, 187.

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”. *Golos Truda* (the Voice of Labour). Russian Anarcho-Syndicalist paper August 25th 1917

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was truly a turning point in modern history. For the first time the working class and working peasants took control and asserted their right to run society. But the Revolution was destroyed by the Communist Party, despite resistance by the relatively small Anarcho-Syndicalist movement.

At the time of the revolution in 1917, which overthrew the Tsar (king) and the capitalist Provisional Government, there were about 10,000 active Anarcho-Syndicalists in Russia, not including the movement in the Ukraine led by Nestor Makhno (see below). There were at least four Anarcho-Syndicalists on the Bolshevik dominated Military Revolutionary Committee which engineered the seizure of power in October.

More importantly, Anarcho-Syndicalists were involved in the Factory Committees which had sprung up after the February Revolution. These were based in workplaces, elected by mass assemblies of the workers and given the role of overseeing the running of the factory and co-ordinating with other workplaces in the same industry or region. Anarcho-Syndicalists were particularly influential among the miners, dockers, postal workers, bakers and played an important part in the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees which met in Petrograd on the eve of the October Revolution. It was to these Factory Committees (and to similar peasant organisations in the countryside) that the Anarcho-Syndicalists looked as the basis for a new self-management which would be ushered in after the revolution. They resisted all efforts to undermine the Committees and take away their power.

How the Communist Party destroyed the Russian Revolution

The Anarcho-Syndicalists had co-operated with the Communist Party of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin in seizing power from the ruling class, believing that once captured power could be diffused. It was not long before they saw that the real intention of the Bolsheviks (Communist Party) was to take power and keep it. Their Marxist concept of socialism did not allow them to trust in the ability of ordinary people to run society in their own interests.

Authoritarian politics of Marxism

Although some Bolshevik pamphlets, such as Lenin’s *State and Revolution* (1918), appeared to support a decentralised and democratic socialism, these rare works were directly contradicted by the bulk of Communist writings and practices.

As we discussed earlier, the Communist Party believed that socialism had to be imposed from above by a authoritarian State under the control of a single vanguard party. As the Communist leader Trotsky wrote in his book *Terrorism and Communism*, “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”. He advocated the militarisation of labour in which, as he put it³:

- “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”.

³ M. Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control*, page 61, 13.

Or, as another leader, Lenin actually yelled at the January 1921 All-Russian Congress of Miners⁴: “Does every worker know how to rule the country? Practical people know that these are fairy tales”.

By this measure, Lenin’s own State and Revolution was a sustained fairy tale which did not reflect his true beliefs.

On the running of industry under so-called “socialism”, Lenin had this to say in 1918⁵:

- “The revolution demands in the interest of socialism [!] that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process ... [there must be] unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during work time ... iron discipline, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader”.

The Communists smash workers’ control in 1917–8

Clearly, workers control in the sense of workers actually self-managing the factories was never part of the Communists’ agenda.

Thus, power was wrested away from the Factory Committees and workers councils and placed in the hands of bodies controlled by the Bolsheviks. The first step in suppressing the Factory Committees was when they were subjected to control by Bolshevik- dominated trade unions. These unions were then put under the thumb of the state, which was totally dominated by the Bolsheviks. Worker control of production was then rapidly destroyed. In 1919, only 10,8% of enterprises were run by individual managers; by 1920, this figure had risen to 82%. In many cases, the managers were the same people the workers had expelled from the factories in 1917!

A similar process took place in the Red Guards, the workers militias set up in the early stages of the revolution. In March 1918, the right of ordinary soldiers to elect their officers was removed by the Communist leader Trotsky, and in mid-1918, nearly 50,000 officers from the old regime were drafted into the new army (now renamed the “Red Army” and placed under the control of the Communist-dominated State) and given commanding posts.

Not a “workers’ state” but an engine of oppression

The so-called “workers state” that the Bolsheviks set up after October 1917 was based on the subordination of the workers councils and Factory Committees to a State comprised of Bolshevik officials and bureaucrats from the old Tsarist regime. This State -the “Soviet Union”- was not based on workers power. The April 1918 constitution of the Soviet Union stated that all workers councils were to be “subordinate to the corresponding higher organ of the Soviet power”, which ultimately meant the Sovnarkom, a Cabinet wholly dominated by Communist leaders. In fact, the new State looked a lot like the old Tsarist one: the civil service was largely run by officials from the old system, for example, in late 1918, on average, less than 10% of the senior officials of key ministries such as Finance were actually members of the Communist Party.

The Russian Communist Party itself, had a tiny membership of 600,000 in a country of about 80 million in 1920. Almost none of its leaders came from the toiling masses and the Party did

⁴ Quoted in Thorpe, 1989, ‘The Workers Themselves’: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, p. 166.

⁵ Lenin, (1918), The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, quoted in D. Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: the Left-Wing Alternative, p226.

not have a large working-class or peasant membership: in 1923, two thirds of its members occupied administrative posts and only one in seven was a manual worker. This in a predominantly working class and working peasant country!

Lenin's systematic repression of the left

The Communist Party also practised systematic repression against its left-wing opponents such as the Anarcho-Syndicalists. Once the Anarchists/Syndicalists' usefulness to them had ended, and once the Anarchists/Syndicalists began to criticise the policies of the new State (coining the term "state-capitalism"), the Communist Party ensured they were suppressed. On the pretext of "fighting crime", a massive wave of raids, arrests and the (typically permanent) closing down of Anarchist/Syndicalist presses across the country began on 9 April 1918. Fighting broke out in Moscow where 26 Anarchist centres were raided, and 40 Anarchists were killed and wounded, and 500 taken prisoner. Similar raids followed in Petrograd and the provinces. In May, most of the main Anarchist papers were closed down, usually permanently. The victims included openly pro-Bolshevik Anarchists who campaigned to convert other Anarcho-Syndicalists to communism and Marxism! The raids also included Anarchists/Syndicalists in the Soviets and Factory Committees.

The April 1918 raids set a pattern which would culminate in the final crushing of the Anarchists/Syndicalists in 1921. An example is the experience of the Anarcho-Syndicalist G.P. Maximov, an activist in the factory committees and the editor of *Golos Trouda* (the Voice of Labour), which we quoted at the start of this section. The paper *Golos Trouda* was suppressed in mid-1918, as was its successor, *Vol'nyi Golos Trouda* (Free Voice of Labour), a few months later. Maximov was detained 6 times between 1919 and 1921. In 1922, following a hunger strike and pressure by the international Anarchist movement, he and several other prominent Anarcho-Syndicalists were deported. Others were not as lucky.

The Communist Party's claim that it was only suppressing Anarchists/ Syndicalists involved in crime and terrorism was false, because almost the entire movement was innocent of such acts. The Communist claim that Anarchists/ Syndicalists were working with the opponents of the Revolution was another lie, as most gave various degrees of support to the regime following the start of the Civil War, despite their criticisms of the Bolsheviks. (Russia was invaded by 17 reactionary armies in 1918, the so-called "White Guards" backed by imperialism who sought to smash the Revolution through military intervention). Similar repression hit other left-wing groups. Workers who stood up against the terror and repression met a similar fate to the rest of the left. A key instrument of the repression was the State secret police, the "Cheka" (the Extraordinary Committee to Fight Counter-Revolution). The December 8 1917 founding decree of the Cheka stated that its role was to "watch the press, saboteurs, strikers, and the Socialist-Revolutionaries of the Right"⁶. Strikers were thus labelled reactionaries who could be subjected to rapidly increasing repression, starting with "confiscation, confinement, deprivation of (food) cards" and ending with summary execution.

As the head of the Cheka stated⁷:

⁶ cited in R.V. Daniels (ed.) , 1985, *A Documentary History of Communism*, vol. 1.p.90. emphasis added.

⁷ quoted in H. Shukman (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of the Russian Revolution*. p.182.

- “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! In the 5 brief years of its existence (1917-22- when it was replaced by the GPU, later renamed the KGB), the Cheka was responsible for at least 140,000 executions, not including another 140,000 those carried out in the course of military operations. Compare this to only 14,000 executions over 50 years by the Okhrana, itself the tool of a brutal Tsarist dictatorship and you get some idea of the extent of Communist repression! It is important to note that large numbers of the victims were political dissidents, striking workers and resistant peasants.

Remember revolutionary Kronstadt 1921

An example of these practices is provided by the fate of the “Kronstadt Revolt” of 1921. In February 1921, a spontaneous general strike against poor conditions broke out in Petrograd (later Leningrad), a strike that was met with repression and the execution by the Cheka of the strike leaders. Hearing of these events, the sailors and workers at the nearby Kronstadt navy base issued a manifesto (the “Petropavlosk Resolution”) calling for the release of left-wing and Anarchist political prisoners, free speech, free trade union activity, the right of peasants to use the land as they saw fit (short of using hired labour), new elections to the workers councils and the removal of the special privileges of the Communist Party. For this they were brutally repressed by the (State-controlled) Red Army under Bolshevik leader Trotsky, and the Cheka.

The Bolsheviks slandered the Kronstadt revolt as “counter-revolutionary” even though it raised essentially the original demands of the revolution four years earlier: “all power to the workers councils” and “land, peace and freedom”. (There is, of course, no evidence that the revolt was directed by outside forces). But the thinking behind the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt was clear enough. At the 10th Congress of the Communist Party, which was meeting at the same time as the revolt occurred, Trotsky slammed those who criticised the Party’s suppression of free political activity, stating that⁸:

- “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!”

It was on this basis — the theory of the “vanguard party” which must impose socialism on the ignorant masses- that the Bolsheviks murdered the revolutionaries who had been in the forefront of the struggle against the Tsar and the Provisional Government.

In 1917, Trotsky had praised the sailors of Kronstadt as the “pride and glory of the Russian Revolution”. But in 1921, when those same militants challenged the dictatorship he had been instrumental in creating, he had them shot down, claiming that the original Kronstadt garrison

⁸ L.Trotsky, *Sochineya*, Moscow 1925, p89, 236. Also cited in Nove, *Studies in Economics and Russia*, 1990, 181 et seq.

had been replaced by “coarse peasant lads” controlled by reactionary forces. However, Trotsky was lying when he claimed that the composition of Kronstadt had changed: at least 91% of the crews of the Petropavlovsk and Sevastopol ships, who spearheaded the revolt, and 75% of the Baltic fleet as a whole, had been recruited before October 1917⁹. The real threat of Kronstadt was political: it was a challenge by revolutionary workers and sailors to a one-party, State-capitalist system built on blood.

By 1921, the process of destroying political freedom was completed. Kronstadt was brutally suppressed with up to 20,000 workers and sailors killed. At the same time, mass arrests of Anarchists/Syndicalists took place throughout the country and the movement’s remaining presses and bookstores were closed down. Following pressure by the international Anarcho-Syndicalist movement, a number of prominent Anarcho-Syndicalists were later deported from the country; others had been murdered in the prisons of the Cheka. Earlier that year, Lenin banned works by the French Anarcho-Syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier and some of the works of Bakunin and Kropotkin (like Bakunin, Kropotkin was a key founder of Anarcho-Syndicalism). The 10th Communist Party Congress of the same year also abandoned all pretence of internal party democracy, banning all internal factions in the Party. The country had moved from a liberating revolution by workers and peasants to a one-party state under the Marxists.

Did the economy make them do it?

Marxists like to excuse the economic and political repression practised by the Communist Party (if they actually admit it happened) as an emergency measure introduced in conditions of war and poverty. They claim that things went wrong in Russia because of external forces, not because of the politics of the Communist Party.

Obviously, the conditions of the Civil War, the poverty of the country, and the failure of the revolution to spread successfully into the more developed countries of Europe all placed huge obstacles in the path of building socialism in Russia.

But these factors cannot take all the blame for the establishment of a Communist Party dictatorship and state-capitalism. We have to also look at the role of the politics of the Communist Party, we have to look at factors besides the economy. The smashing of workers control in the factories, and the repression of the Anarcho-Syndicalists started before the Civil War began in Russia with the revolt of the Czechoslovak Corps in May 1918. Similarly, the Kronstadt revolt, the banning of factions and the final suppression and deportation of the Anarcho-Syndicalists took place after the war had for all practical purposes ended: the so-called “White” armies had been defeated in all of the Soviet Union except for a few small pockets of resistance in the country’s Far East by November 1920.

Of course, any worker-peasant revolution needs physical self-defence, a co-ordinated economy and international support. Nonetheless, putting reactionary generals in power in the army, putting the capitalists and bureaucrats in charge of the factories, subordinating workers and peasants to a one-party State, maintaining wage-labour and setting up death squads to murder strikers and Anarcho-Syndicalists and other socialists is not a recipe for creating a free society. It is a recipe for dictatorship and capitalism. 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.

⁹ I. Geltzer, Kronstadt 1917- 21: the Fate of a Soviet Democracy. p. 207.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION IN THE UKRAINE¹⁰

Anarchist/Syndicalist influence here (the South of Russia) was dominant right up to 1921. An insurgent peasant army led by the Anarchist Nestor Makhno played a central role in defeating the local counter-revolutionary forces and the numerous armies of foreign intervention. This army was internally democratic, with all officers elected by the soldiers and subject to the control of the Regional Congresses of Workers, Peasants and Insurgents initiated by the Anarchists/ Syndicalists. This movement -called the “Makhnovischna”- at first worked closely with the Communists in the Civil War. The Red Army led by Trotsky signed a treaty of co-operation and Lenin talked of giving the Ukraine over as an experiment in building an Anarchist/Syndicalist society.

At first, the Makhnovists were hailed as heroes of the revolution by the Communist press. They played a key role in defeating the counterrevolutionary armies of Wrangel and Deniken. However as soon as the threat of invasion had been overcome the Communist leaders tore up the treaties and slandered the Makhnovists with disgraceful and unfounded lies. They declared war on the Anarcho-Syndicalists as if they were an army of reaction. After a brutal war, in which nearly 90% of the Makhnovist troops were killed, the Red Army succeeded in breaking the back of the Makhnovist movement.

The achievements of the Makhnovists were not only military. As their army moved through the Ukraine they encouraged and helped the setting up of free collectives among the working peasantry and farm labourers. Often this had to take second place to the need to fight and defeat the varied foreign armies of occupation. What was important was that it was proved, even in the conditions of war and invasion, that production could be organised to benefit all rather than to line the pockets of a few. In the areas controlled by the movement, there was full freedom of speech and assembly, showing that even in conditions of civil war, it is possible and indeed essential for the workers and working peasants to enjoy political freedom during a revolution. It also shows that a democratic workers militia can function quite effectively in conditions of Civil War, although obviously the numerical superiority of the Red Army won in the end. Repression cannot create freedom; only freedom can create order.

LESSONS

The Russian experience also shows that the fake socialists and their parties cannot be trusted. If a genuine democratic (and stateless) socialism is to triumph power must stay with those who produce society's wealth. No party, no matter how well intentioned, can deliver socialism on a plate. Repression cannot create freedom, it can only create more repression. Workers and peasants must take power and build the new order themselves. It also shows the need for a united and effective Anarcho-Syndicalist movement. Divisions and confusion undermined the Russian Anarcho-Syndicalists.

¹⁰ see P.Archinov, History of the Makhnovist Movement, Voline, The Unknown Revolution, and M.Malet, Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War. Also see Nestor Makhno, The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays.

THE SPANISH REVOLUTION¹¹

Spain is one of the Western countries where the Anarcho-Syndicalist influence predominated in the working class and working peasantry. Introduced in the last century it rapidly spread throughout the country. This led to the formation of the Anarchist Union CNT (National Confederation of Labour) in 1911. In the years up to the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 the CNT had over two million members. It was the major union in the most industrialised areas, especially the province of Catalonia and its capital Barcelona. It also had a large base among day labourers and small peasants in most provinces.

The CNT was a revolutionary union of workers (usually described as Syndicalist or Anarcho-Syndicalist). Its role was twofold. Firstly to fight to improve conditions for workers and secondly to organise for the overthrow of capitalism. Its beliefs were translated into action at every opportunity and this militant tradition attracted workers in their hundreds of thousands.

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 experience and organisation of the CNT shows that contrary to popular belief Anarchists are not anti-organisation. In reality Anarcho-Syndicalism is highly organised and allows for the participation of all. Nor are we always against centralisation. What is important is that those at the centre are recallable and directly responsible to those they are elected to represent.

By the time of the revolution, the CNT had grown to about two million members. But the Anarcho-Syndicalists did not restrict their role to the workplace and the CNT. They also organised an Anarcho-Syndicalist political organisation, the FAI, to defend and spread Anarcho-Syndicalist ideas in the unions; organised rent boycotts in poor areas; and set up youth and women's organisations. The CNT itself included working peasants, farmworkers and the unemployed. It even set up free workers schools!

The Revolution Begins

The Revolution started with an attempted Fascist coup following the victory of the Popular Front (an alliance of liberal, republic, socialist, and Marxist parties) in the 1936 elections. Fascists are extreme right wing supporters of dictatorship, and are backed by the ruling class to suppress the struggles of the workers and the poor for a better life.

¹¹ On the Spanish Revolution, see among others, B.Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution*, J.Peirats, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, G.Leval, *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*, anon. *Spanish Revolution: Anarchism in Action*, M. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*.

Although the fascists managed to maintain control of parts of Spain, they were defeated in many areas, as the workers and working peasants mobilised to defeat the coup attempt. A Civil War broke out between the forces in the fascist-controlled areas and the areas controlled by the workers and working peasants (sometimes called the “Republican” zone).

The Anarcho-Syndicalists believed that the Civil War was not just a fight against fascism but also against the capitalist/State system which had spawned fascism in the first place. Anarcho-Syndicalist influence was everywhere amongst the masses, in the formation of a workers militia by the unions, in the seizure of factories by workers, in land seizures and collectivisations by farm labourers and working peasants.

This marked the beginning of the revolution for the Anarcho-Syndicalists. Thus they set about seizing factories and capitalist farms and turning them over to workers control. In the zones dominated by Anarcho-Syndicalist influence workers self-management became a reality. In Catalonia there were at least 2,000 industrial and commercial collectives. At least 60% of “Republican” Spain’s agriculture (that part controlled by anti-fascist forces including the Anarcho-Syndicalists) was collectivised.

In the workplaces councils or “comite” elected by assemblies of workers and representing all sectors of the enterprise, were given the task of administering the collectivised factory. Collectivised enterprises in each sector of industry were represented in an Economic Federation. This in turn was topped by a General Industrial Council which would closely control the whole industry.

Here is a description of the organisation of gas, electricity and water in Barcelona¹².

“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 requirements 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 in-

¹² This account is taken from *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* by G. Leval.

roducing 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 U. G. T. (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

The achievements of collectivisation in Barcelona were many. Take for example the tramways. Out of the 7,000 workers 6,500 were members of the CNT. Because of the street battles all transport had been brought to a halt. The transport syndicate (as unions of the CNT were known) appointed a commission of seven to occupy the administrative offices while others inspected the tracks and drew up a plan of repair work that needed to be done. Five days after the fighting stopped 700 tramcars, instead of the usual 600, all painted in the black and red colours of the CNT, were operating on the streets of Barcelona.

With the profit motive gone, the trams had belonged to a Belgian company before the workers took over, safety became more important and 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. They worked overtime and Sundays to do their share for the anti-fascist struggle. To further underline the fact that getting rid of the bosses and rulers would not lead to a breakdown of order it can be pointed out that in the three years of collectivisation there were only six cases of workers stealing 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. Often the working peasants and farm labourers went further than their counterparts in the towns and cities. Not only was production collectivised; in rural areas consumption was too. In many of these areas money was abolished.

Large estates were taken over by landless labourers, small peasants put their land together so that it could be worked more efficiently by the use of machinery. Collectives were based around the villages and federated on a regional basis.

Usually the decision to collectivise was made at an assembly (a meeting of all the village). It meant handing over land, livestock, tools, seed, stocks of wheat and other produce. The land was then divided into sectors, each of which was assigned to a work group of about a dozen who elected their own delegate. Produce went into the “pile” for communal consumption. Each would produce according to their ability, each would consume according to their needs. 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). Most of these “individualists” eventually joined the collectives when they saw how successful they were.

Collectivisation did not only apply to the land. In the villages workshops were set up where all the local trades people would produce tools, furniture, etc. for the village and also carry out repairs to the collectivists houses. Bakers, butchers, barbers and so on were also collectivised.

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 and young children who had never been to school were given the education denied to them by the landlords and their system.

The Workers Militia

In the early state of the revolution, the armed forces of the State had effectively collapsed. In their place, the trade unions and left-wing forces, especially the Anarchists and the CNT, set about organising the armed workers and peasants into democratic workers militias. Overall, there were 150,00 volunteers willing to fight where they were needed. The majority were members of the CNT. All officers were elected by the rank-and-file and had no special privileges.

Womens’ Action

Gains were also made by women. In relation to their role during the Civil War observers have pointed out that they played a full part in the anti- fascist resistance. They were present everywhere — on committees, in the militias, in the front line. In the early battles of the war women fought alongside men as a matter of course. It was not merely a case of women filling in for men who were away at the front. (Which is usually the case in wartime. When the war is over and women are no longer needed in the labour force, they are pushed back into the home).

They were in the militias and fought alongside the men as equals. They were organising the collectives and taking up the fight for against the sexist attitudes of the past which have no place in any real revolution.

The Anarcho-Syndicalist women’s organisation, Mujeres Libres (Free Women), had 30,000 members. It had been active before the Civil War organising women workers and distributing information on contraception. Mujeres Libres was a specifically working-class women’s organisation, committed to class struggle and worker-peasant revolution. It was allied to the Anarcho-Syndicalist youth, community, union and political organisations. During the war abortion was legalised in the “Republican 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 said¹³:

- “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 is not inevitable though and does not remove the need for propaganda and activity against sexism, not only in society as a whole but also within the revolutionary movement itself.

The Revolution Defeated

But despite all these achievements, the revolution was defeated in 1939 when the Fascists won the war and crushed the working-class and working peasantry with a brutal dictatorship.

Why did this happen? In part, this outcome reflected the strengths of the fascists who had military and other support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

The Anarcho-Syndicalists also made mistakes. In our opinion they hesitated in carrying out their programme – Instead of organising the working class and working peasants to take full power, of making a direct appeal to the workers to take control of economic and social affairs, they aimed for maximum anti-fascist unity, going so far as to collaborate with the Popular Front and ended up joining the government.

This required the CNT to make many otherwise unnecessary compromises on its revolutionary programme, with disastrous results. The pace of change was halted. The Popular Front government got a chance to undermine the collectives and militia (in order to defend capitalism and the State). The result was massive demoralisation by the workers- definitely one of the reasons why the war was lost. The State preferred the risk of a fascist victory to that of workers power. It had no faith in the ability of workers to run society.

The Communist Party of Spain played leading role in the Popular Front government assault on the revolution. They also preferred defeat by the fascists then the victory of Anarcho-Syndicalism. The Communists were tied to the needs of the Russian dictator Stalin (Stalin was the successor of Lenin). Stalin’s foreign policy centred around not upsetting the Western powers. To the Communists the restoration of the capitalist order was preferable to seeing the working class take power. And that should come as no surprise as the Marxist system in Russia is no more than another form of capitalism.

We think the CNT should have stuck to its original programme, which offered a clear way to win the revolution. Rather than ally with the Popular Front, it should have organised : revolution against the bosses, the State and their fascist friends, alliances only with working class and working peasant organisations, defence by a democratic workers/peasants militia, and the immediate decolonisation of the Spanish colonies.

¹³ Margorita Balaguer quoted in *Blood of Spain*, edited by Ronald Fraser. page 287.

LESSONS

But in any case, the main point is that given the right conditions mutual aid and co-operation will flourish. It shows that the workers, peasants and the poor can create a new world without bosses or a government. It showed that Anarcho-Syndicalist ideas and methods (such as revolutionary trade unionism) can work. And it showed that imperialism is the enemy of all workers: the fascists used the Spanish colonial army from North Africa to launch their attack and slaughter Spanish workers and peasants.

BREAD AND ROSES, TOO

History is not neutral. What we learn in school is the necessity for government, rulers and capitalism. What we do not learn is that many times it has been shown that this government is not necessary. People are not inherently bad. Given the right conditions a spirit of mutual aid and co-operation can grow. People are not naturally evil and greedy.

How we act is related to the structure of society and the dominant value system within it. When structures are changed and oppression and exploitation is done away with the “goodness” that is in most of us come through and flourishes as it did when the workers held the reigns in Russia and Spain. The experience of self-management is not limited to these countries but is something that has been seen in most countries at some stage.

JOIN US!

What Anarcho-Syndicalists 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. An organisation that allows us to struggle together for a new society. An organisation that will work in the unions to fight the bureaucratic leaders, win the rank and file to Anarcho-Syndicalist ideas, and transform these workers organisations into revolutionary combat units.

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.

Anarcho-syndicalism suffered severe blows from the rise of fascism and communism in the 1920s and 1930s, but the collapse of the fake socialism of the Marxists and the Labour Parties, and the crisis of capitalism across the world, Anarcho-syndicalism is again re-emerging as a powerful current amongst the masses.

If you like what you have just read, if you want to be part of this growing movement, you should start working to build just such an organisation. You should join the Workers Solidarity Federation.

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