

Class Struggle, Capitalism and the State

A Position Paper of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front

Bikisha Media Collective

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“Have you realised that there is, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, an irreconcilable antagonism that results inevitably from their respective stations in life?... That as a result, war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is unavoidable, and that the only outcome can be the destruction of the latter?”

Mikhail Bakunin, 1869
“The Policy of the International”

“In the social domain all human history represents an uninterrupted chain of struggles waged by the working masses for their rights, liberty, and a better life... The class struggle created by the enslavement of the workers and their aspirations to liberty gave birth, in the oppression, to the idea of anarchism...”

Nestor Makhno, Peter Archinov, Ida Mett et al
The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists

INTRODUCTION

Anarchists believe in a revolution by the workers and the poor to establish libertarian and stateless Socialism.

We believe that the working masses – the industrial and rural workers – produce all social wealth. Intellectual and manual labour forms the basis of all societies.¹

However, the products of this work are controlled and owned by a small and non-working minority: capitalists, politicians, top military and State officials, and other supervisory strata. These parasitic classes are buttressed in their privileged position by the structures of authority and oppression: the State, the wage system, racism, imperialism, sexism, etc.

The opposite side of this exploitative and domineering rule of the bosses is the impoverishment and subjugation of the labourers. The majority of people suffer various degrees of deprivation while the small minority enjoys all the good things of this world, and more.

South Africa is characterised by extremely high levels of inequality, following both race and class lines. A recent survey found that in 1991, Africans earned only 28% of total income even though they constituted 75% of the population; whilst Whites, only 13% of the population, earned 61% of total income. At the same time it found that “[a]lmost three quarters of total inequality can be ascribed to inequality ...within population groups”. For example, the richest 20% of African households (many of whom are entrepreneurs, managers etc.) increased their real incomes by almost 40% over the period 1975- 1991, while the poorest 40% of African households’ incomes decreased by nearly 40% over the same period. A similar decline in real income was reported for the poorest 40% of Whites.²

¹ see, among others, Makhno, Archinov et al, [1926], *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, reprinted by Workers Solidarity Movement. Ireland. p14,16; R. Rocker, 1948, *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*; A. Berkman, (1989), *What is Communist Anarchism?* Phoenix Press. London. pp. 3,5–6,72–4; A. Berkman, (1964), *ABC of Anarchism*. Freedom Press. London. p50.

² figures from Whiteford, A., (March 11–17 1994), “The Poor Get Even Poorer,” in *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, p.8. See also Pearce, J., (March 17–23 1995), “Still a Land of Inequality,” in *Weekly Mail and Guardian*. pp. 8–9

DIFFERENT FORMS OF CLASS SOCIETY

Historically class exploitation has been organised in a number of different ways.

Prior to capitalism's emergence these included the feudal mode of production as existed in parts of Europe, Africa and Asia (based on the exploitation of unfree farmers by a class of warrior-landlords/knights) and the tributary mode of production, in Africa and elsewhere (based on the conquest and exploitation of farming communities by a ruling class controlling access to land, cattle, trade, and military force).³

In every class society there has been an oppressed class whose labour has created the wealth of that society and ruling class who has controlled that wealth. At every stage the oppressed have fought back e.g. slave revolts in Rome and Greece, peasant risings in Europe and Asia, and working class struggle today.

All class systems are supported by the State, which can be understood as a hierarchically structured coercive authority governing a particular territory. The main organs of the State are the police, army, judiciary and the civil service. The functions of the State are to defend and legitimise the unjust class system.⁴

CAPITALISM AND CLASSES UNDER CAPITALISM

The modern class system is capitalism, which emerged in Europe from the 1500s. This is based on the pursuit of profit, and on competition between firms to sell their commodities on the market.⁵

Capitalism exists at two levels.

Firstly, capitalism exists as a *mode of production* made up of a combination of historically specific forces and relations of production.

The forces of production (i.e. productive technologies) associated with capitalism refer mainly to industrial machinery.

The relations of production (i.e. class system) associated with the capitalist mode are as follows.⁶

(i) Firstly, there is a **ruling class** that owns and controls the predominant part of the means of production, as well as controls the labour power of others. It also exercises control over the State apparatus. This class is also called the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, or, the "bosses and rulers."

³ The precolonial Swazi and Zulu states were examples of the tributary mode of production. See e.g. Wright, J, and C Hamilton, (1989), "Traditions and Transformations," in Duminy, A, and B Guest (eds.), *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910*. University of Natal. See also Hall, M., (1987), "Archaeology and Modes of Production in Pre-Colonial Southern Africa", in *Journal of Southern African Studies* vol. 14, no. 1

⁴ see Makhno et al, [1926], pp. 17–18; Rucker, 1948, pp. 349–353; Berkman, 1989, chapter 3, 8, 10, 13; Berkman, 1964, Ch. 2. Also see "After the Collapse of Socialism: Anarchism Today" in *Workers Solidarity*, no 1, May/June 1995. Johannesburg. pp. 8–12. Also see Sam Dolgoff (ed.), (1973) *Bakunin on Anarchism*; and P.A. Kropotkin, (1970), *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution* (M.Miller (ed.). MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, England))

⁵ Berkman 1989, chapter 2

⁶ This definition draws heavily on Class War, (1992), *Unfinished Business: the Politics of Class War*. AK Press and CWF. chapter 3. This is essentially the same as that given in E.O. Wright, (1978), *Class, Crisis, and the State*, New Left Books. London.

Examples: big business, corporate executives, top politicians of all parties, civil servants, generals and majors.

Role in society: maintaining and extending their domination and exploitation of society

Size of South African ruling class (as calculated from the census): 2,5% of population

(ii) Secondly, there is the **working class**. The working class neither owns nor controls the means of production. As a result it is forced to work for the ruling class for wages, and without real control over the work process (or society). We also include in the working class the poor who are marginalised by the capitalist system, such as the unemployed, the alienated youth, and many of the self-employed (these groups are sometimes called the “lumpen-proletariat”). Other terms for the working class: the proletariat or the “workers and the poor”.

Examples: blue collar workers like builders, white collar workers like clerks, service workers like waitresses, farm workers, the unemployed, the poor and destitute, soldiers up to NCO (non commissioned officer) level.

Role in society: to be exploited by the bosses and rulers through the wage system and through taxes; to be ordered around by the state, the bosses and the police; to provide the recruits for the army and the police.

Size of South African working class (as calculated from the census): about 81% of the population (this includes the majority of Africans and other Black people, as well as two thirds of Whites)

(iii) Thirdly, there is a **middle class**. The middle class is made up of three elements: small employers; middle- level managers and foremen; and professionals. Small employers have control and ownership of the means of production, but they only have a limited control over the labour power of others because they employ few people. The middle- level managers exercise a limited level of control over investment and similar decisions, over the means of production and over the labour of others but they do not own the means of production. The professionals work for a wage, but unlike the workers they have a significant degree of control over how they do their work. Other terms: “petty bourgeoisie”.

Examples: small employers, supervisors, foremen, lawyers, journalists, doctors, and academics.

Role in society: to provide the middle management of capitalism and the State; to provide technical skills and “expertise” to the bosses and rulers; to manufacture “culture” like music, TV, fashion etc.

Size of South African middle class (as calculated from the census): 12,5% of population

Secondly, capitalism also exists as an *economic system or social formation*. This refers to a set of articulated (linked) modes of production, in which the capitalist mode of production dominates non- capitalist modes of production, and extracts value from them through trade and labour supply.⁷

Capitalism is an inherently expansive system that has spread right across the planet in its search for new markets and cheap labour and raw materials. This expansion has been aided by the State in the form of **Imperialism**.

However, as capitalism expanded outwards it did not always simply dissolve pre- existing modes of production in favour of the wages system. Instead it often preserved, restructured and/ or created new modes of production in these areas. These modes of production had non-capitalist

⁷ see Wright, (1978); Laclau, E., (1971), “Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America,” in *New Left Review*, no. 67.

relations of production but they were still dominated by the capitalist mode that extracted value from them through trade and labour extraction.

Examples: slavery in the American South for the purpose of producing cotton for the British textile industry; the migrant labour system in which the worker leaves her or his rural home for a limited period in which wages are earned to pay taxes etc.; the restructuring of agricultural communities in Africa to produce cash crops.

The modern **peasantry** is a product of the restructuring of pre-capitalist farming communities to provide cash crops.

A working **definition** for a peasant is “a rural cultivator enjoying access to a specific portion of land, the fruits of which he can dispose of as if he owned the land; and who, by the use of family labour, seeks to satisfy the consumption needs of his family and to meet the demands arising from his involvement in a wider economic system”.⁸

There are a number of problems with this definition. One is that it hides stratification among the peasantry. We should therefore further **subdivide** the peasantry into

(i) **upper peasants** (who have managed to accumulate wealth and who employ the labour of others)

(ii) **middle peasants** (who get by on their family labour alone); and

(iii) **poor peasants** (who work their own land but cannot make ends meet without engaging in wage labour)

We anarchists consider the rich peasants to be exploiters and therefore direct our attention to the middle and poor peasants, who can be lumped together as the **working peasantry**.

WHY DO WE OPPOSE CAPITALISM?

We oppose capitalism because it is an inherently **exploitative** system. The bosses own the factories, banks, mines, shops, etc. We workers don't. We are compelled to sell our labour to the boss for a wage. Peasants are forced to grow cash crops to make ends meet. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of us 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. The lower prices the bosses and state marketing boards can pay the peasant for the crops, the more profits they make. Capitalism is based on paying workers and peasants less than the full value of their labour (“exploitation” in the technical sense of the word) and using the surplus for the purpose of enriching the bosses and making more profits. Overall, we would argue that the workers and working peasants produce all wealth. The only exceptions to this general rule are some sections of the middle class who do useful productive work (e.g. doctors, teachers). All other classes are parasitic and depend for their existence on exploitation. 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.

⁸ This section on the peasantry draws on Bundy, C., (1972), “The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry,” in *African Affairs*, no. 71 esp. p371; and H. Johnson, (1988), “Survival and Change on the Land,” in B. Crow, M. Thorpe et al, *Survival and Change in the Third World*. Cambridge. Polity Press

Capitalism is **authoritarian**. At both the level of the workplace and at the level of society as a whole capitalism is an authoritarian system. At the workplace level, capitalist enterprises are run by managers and owners who make all key decisions. The vast majority of people in a workplace – the workers – have no real say at all. Decision-making revolves around the maximisation of profits; any company which worries about human costs unrepresented in costs and revenues will not be able to compete effectively in the capitalist system. Similarly, concern about long-term issues like the environmental crisis is undermined by competition in capitalism, which makes it irrational to do anything other than devote oneself to short-term goals. At the societal level, the inequalities associated with class systematically exclude most people from active and equal involvement in political activity e.g. lack time, education. In addition, the very existence of these inequalities gives rise to the State which perpetuates the system where the few rule over the many. This is reinforced by the tendency of capitalism to move to a monopoly situation where a few giant companies dominate the entire economy. In other words, capitalism embodies unfair power relations.

Capitalism prioritises **profit-making over 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. Useless goods are promoted because they are profitable, not because they are needed. Poverty, bad working conditions etc. all take a back seat to the goal of making money.

Capitalism is **inefficient**. Market systems are inherently wasteful, because supply is only matched to demand after the fact of production. There may be more goods produced than people can buy; in this case goods go to waste (they are not used at all as this is better from the point of view of the capitalists than giving them to those who need them). There is no correlation between what is produced and what is actually needed inside society. Instead, different companies produce a number of almost identical products resulting in unnecessary waste. The profit motive means that markets systematically fail to meet basic needs in favour of the needs of those with the money i.e. the ruling and middle classes. Contrary to the ideology that capitalism is to the benefit of all, there is a constant contradiction between the private interests of capitalists and the general needs of the majority of people.

Capitalism **undermines social solidarity**. The market forces people to compete for jobs, wages etc. It also promotes greed and similar negative social values. In this way markets undermine positive values like solidarity etc.

As we discuss in our other pamphlets, the capitalist system along with the State is also a **primary cause of oppressions like racism, sexism, imperialism etc.**

WHY DO WE OPPOSE THE STATE?

The term **State** refers to a set of administrative, hierarchical, bureaucratic, coercive and legal structures-the legislature (Parliament), the civil service, the judiciary, the army and police- co-

ordinated by an executive e.g.. the cabinet. These mechanisms of domination and control have an exclusive legal monopoly on the use of force and a territorial basis.⁹

The State emerges with the division of society into classes and is designed to protect the ruling and exploiting minority ruling class from the oppressed classes.¹⁰ Economic exploitation and the coercive institutions of political power have always gone hand in hand.

When we say that the State upholds the ruling class we mean the whole ruling class- and not just the capitalists or bosses in the economy, but also the generals, the politicians and the top civil servants. The State is not simply the tool of economic interests, but a structure of domination in its own right and with its own dynamics. History provides many examples of the way in which the State's drive to power has gone against the optimal development of the capitalist economy.¹¹ Overall, the State and capitalism are like two inseparable Siamese twins – each requires the other.

The State will always defend the ruling class. This is because the State is funded by taxes and loans generated in the process of exploitation, because the top personnel of the State are mainly drawn (like the bosses of the companies) from the few who own all the wealth (thus sharing common values and interests), and because the State was created specifically in order to defend the ruling class. In addition, those controlling the State develop a vested interest in the power and wealth that they derive from their position, thus turning them into zealous defenders of the class system.

NO ROAD TO FREEDOM

The State cannot be used to secure the liberation of the working class.¹²

through **parliament**: real power does not lie in parliament, it lies in the military, in the upper levels of the State bureaucracy, and in the company boardrooms. The State is a huge machine containing many powerful non- elected officials. All elected parties are thus, no matter their intentions, fundamentally constrained in their ability to change society by the nature of the State. If the ruling class was genuinely threatened by an elected government, it would remove it by an authoritarian solution such as a military coup, or by intrigues. In this way, all elected parties are forced to confine themselves to reforms that do not challenge the fundamental fact of class rule.

through the **so-called workers (communist) State**: the State is an hierarchical structure that is built to allow a minority to rule over the rest of society. Any attempt to use a State structure, “red” or otherwise, as a means to liberate the masses can only result in the rule of yet another small minority, which will rapidly assume all the features of a ruling class. In this way, the hoped for revolution is strangled by a new group of exploiters.

The working class can only secure its freedom by mass struggle against the State and capitalism, and only take power through its own democratic mass organisations such as the unions.

The State is driven by two main imperatives.¹³

⁹ Yudelman, D. (1983), *The Emergence Of Modern South Africa: State, Capital And The Incorporation Of Organised Labour On The South African Gold Fields 1902–39*. p17; Posel, D, (1991), *The Making Of Apartheid 1948–61: Conflict And Compromise*. Clarendon Press. Cambridge. pp. 21–2

¹⁰ Makhno et al, [1926], pp. 17–18; Rocker, 1948, p349

¹¹ Rocker, 1948, p349

¹² Makhno et al, [1926], pp. 17–18; Rocker, 1948, 349–50; Class War, 1992, pp. 45–7.

¹³ Posel, 1991, pp. 20–1; Yudelman, 1983, pp. 37–42.

Firstly, the State wants to ensure that the processes of **accumulation** in the capitalist economy continue to occur, because it derives its revenue from taxation and from finance from capital markets. The State does this by trying to keep society “stable”, by enforcing the laws of private property and contract, by providing infrastructure, such as roads, teaching people the to have a pro- capitalist outlook, and, in some cases, social services to alleviate the worst excesses of the capitalist system.¹⁴

Secondly, the State wishes to preserve its **domination** over society. The State generally thus tries to legitimise its rule amongst (at least some of) its subjects (hence the claims of the State that it “represents the people”, maintains “law and order” etc.). This is of course backed up by the State’s military power.

The way in which the State acts in a given situation will generally be in line with these imperatives. However, this does not mean that the State has everything its own way. Popular unrest and resistance can force the State to concede basic civil and social rights and to drop or modify unpopular policies.

WHY DO WE STAND FOR CLASS STRUGGLE AND CLASS REVOLUTION?

Why does the class struggle arise and what does it imply?

As stated above, capitalism and the State are based on the exploitation of the majority of humanity. This **class exploitation generates a class struggle between the exploiters and the exploited**. This takes place both at work and in the community, and may be under the banner of a wide variety of ideologies: nationalist, feminist, religious etc. Most of these differ from anarchism substantially.

In order to end this class system, we anarchists believe that revolution by the working class is necessary. Only in this way can the masses take control of their lives and enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Only a productive class can build a free society, because only a productive class does not need to exploit.¹⁵ This means the workers and poor (and maybe some sections of the middle class like doctors, teachers). Any revolution made by a ruling class, be it progressive or reactionary, White or Black, will only continue the class system under a new guise.

We do not support the idea that society should be changed from above. It can be, but it won’t be much better for those of us at the bottom.

The revolution will destroy capitalism, the State and all forms of oppression, and build a new self-managed society based on worker councils (which will develop from the trade unions) and community councils (which will develop from the civic associations) and distribution according to need. All forms of coercive authority, oppression and exploitation will be abolished.

¹⁴ see also Class War, 1992, pp. 43–5; J. Natrass, (1988), *The South African Economy: Its Growth And Change*. Oxford University Press. Cape Town. pp. 226–231 on these points.

¹⁵ “Any class may be revolutionary in its day and time; only a productive class may be libertarian in nature, because it does not need to exploit” (A. Meltzer, *Anarchism: Arguments For And Against*, pp. 14–15).

A Note on the Middle Class

The **middle class** is stuck in the middle of the working class/ ruling class struggle. As such, it will probably **split** before and during the revolution between those supporting the bosses and those supporting the working class (just like some working class people will probably join the bosses against the revolution). Nonetheless, it is important to stress that those middle class people who join the workers movement should come as comrades putting their abilities at the service of the masses, rather than as experts and leaders who give the orders.¹⁶

– The Class Struggle and its Relationship to Other Forms of Oppression

In addition to class exploitation, capitalism and the modern State generate a number of **other oppressive relationships**. These include racism, imperialism, sexism, homophobia and environmental degradation.

Generally speaking these oppressions allow capitalism to super-exploit socially weaker sections of the working class (like Blacks and women) and to divide the working masses through ideological manipulation and the provision of unequal rights.

As anarchists, we give our full support to struggles against these forms of oppression, seeing this as a central part of the class struggle. **Class struggle does not ignore sexism, racism etc. insofar as the majority of people who are affected by these oppressions (and who are also affected the worst by these oppressions) are working class, insofar as these oppressions are rooted in the capitalist system, and insofar as the working class can only be united and mobilised on the basis of opposing all oppression, these issues are all class issues. It is impossible to mobilise the working class without dealing with all the issues that affect the working class. That is to say, the class struggle can only succeed if it is anti-racist, anti-sexist etc.** We stand for the destruction of all special oppressions that divide the working class.

We also stand for united, integrated, internationalist class struggle politics. No one section of the working class can win freedom on its own, the struggle must be united (this is where a strength lies, and because we have common interests) and internationalist (because no revolution can succeed in one country alone).

The fight against racism etc. must be at the same time a class struggle.

Capitalism and the State are the primary cause of all special oppressions. It follows that the fight against racism etc. must be a fight against capitalism and the State. **Since these structures can only be beaten through class struggle, it follows that only a united working class can defeat racism etc.**¹⁷

Racism, sexism, homophobia and imperialism affect people in all classes. However, the **class position and relative privilege** of Black people, women, homosexuals, and colonised people in the exploiting classes not only gives these individuals a **vested interest in capitalist exploitation**, but also **modifies their experience of oppression**.

¹⁶ Class War, (1992), *Unfinished Business: The Politics Of Class War*. AK Press and CWF. p83; Kropotkin, *An Appeal to the Young*, various editions.

¹⁷ Our analysis of the question of separate organisation draws heavily on the ideas of the Mujeres Libres (anarchist women's group in Spain): see M.A. Ackelsberg, (1993), "Models of Revolution: rural women and anarchist collectivisation in Spain," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 20 (3); P. Carpena, (1986), "Spain 1936: Free Women- a Feminist, Proletarian And Anarchist Movement," in M. Gadant (ed.), *Women of the Mediterranean*. Zed Books. London and New Jersey; V. Ortiz, (1979), "Mujeres Libres: Anarchist Women In The Spanish Civil War," *In Antipode: A Radical Journal Of Geography* 10 (3) & 11 (1).

We do not believe that these individuals can, in general, play a useful or liberating role in destroying the main basis of all oppression: capitalism and the State. Instead these individuals, unless they genuinely adopt a class struggle anarchist position, will tend to either divert the struggle, or hijack it for their own benefit.

– **The Power of the Working Class**

The working masses are not powerless. We carry society on our shoulders through our labour. It is precisely because of this fact that we have real power, the power to halt and defeat the class enemy. By action at the point of production, such as strikes, we can injure the boss class.¹⁸

Important concessions can be won from the ruling class in the pre- revolutionary period by mass action, particularly in the workplace. We therefore support action in the workplace, and also argue that progressive struggles should be linked to the power of the workers.

The revolution must involve the direct seizure of the land, factories, mines etc. from the bosses and the placing of these means of production under workers control. It is therefore essential that anarchists make revolutionary propaganda and help to build democratic workers organisations in the workplaces.

It is true that **the concentration of workers in large factories in a co-operative/interdependent labour process aids the class struggle by making organising easier, and class-consciousness stronger.**

But we are opposed to the idea that this gives the urban industrial workers a “leading” role in the revolution in comparison with other elements of the working masses.

Rural workers/Peasants are as capable of mass struggle and revolutionary action as industrial workers and it is nonsense to see them as a disunited “sack of potatoes” or as the inevitably reactionary defenders of private property. These points are clearly shown by the leading role of peasants in the Spanish Revolution (1936–7).¹⁹

ON ELECTIONS

Elections are not a form of class struggle.

We unconditionally support and defend the right to vote, and the other civil and political rights that go alongside it in a bourgeois/ capitalist democracy.

But we need to recognise that these rights were only won and can only be defended by working class struggle. The State is not some neutral tool at the disposal of the majority, but a weapon of the bosses: real power does not lie in parliament but in the company boardrooms, the State bureaucracy and the military. We are not saying that the different political parties will not implement different policies to each other but we are saying that all the parties will conform to the constraints imposed by the nature of the State.

In addition, we are opposed to the idea that 400 people in parliament have the right to make decisions for the 40 million people outside it. All power must be exercised by the working class as a

¹⁸ see Berkman (1989), chapter 12; Rocker (1948), pp. 370–1.

¹⁹ see E. Conlon, (1993), *The Spanish Civil War: Anarchism in Action*. Workers Solidarity Movement. Dublin; D. Geurin, (1971), *Anarchism: From Theory To Practice*. Monthly Review Press. pp. 114–143; Direct Action Movement. *Anarchism in Action: the Spanish Revolution*. Aldgate Press. London.

whole through grassroots worker and community councils. The unions and the civic associations will provide the basis for these councils.

IN DEFENCE OF CLASS STRUGGLE

The bourgeoisie and others claim that the class struggle is irrelevant. We disagree.

The argument that claims that the working class is somehow “disappearing” is totally wrong.²⁰

On a global scale the blue collar or industrial working class is growing (e.g. in the Newly Industrialising Countries of the Third World such as Brazil, Korea, and South Africa). The “Third World” includes Africa, Asia, South America, and, arguably, parts of the ex-Eastern bloc.

While it is true that service sector and white-collar jobs have expanded considerably in the First World, these jobs are by nature working class as they involve neither ownership nor economic control of the means of production. In other words they are based on exploitation through the wages system. By the “First World” we mean the advanced industrial capitalist countries of West Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

It is theoretically flawed to identify the working class purely with blue-collar industrial workers. If we define a class in terms of the technology it uses (e.g. industry and machines) rather than in terms of its position in society (e.g. exploitation through the wage system) we end up with an absurd situation where every technological breakthrough is seen to herald the end of the working class. It needs to be remembered that while capitalism is a dynamic system that constantly changes its technology, it never changes its nature: a class system.

No class system (e.g. capitalism) can exist without the exploitation of a working class majority and therefore the working class cannot “disappear” until stateless socialism is established.²¹

It is wrong to argue that the working class has “sold out” to capitalism, particularly in the First World.

One version of this argument claims that the factory situation somehow inevitably teaches the workers to accept capitalism, the bosses, greed etc. This view is deterministic and simplistic. History is a complex process that does not have any inevitable outcomes. What happens depends on the interaction of a lot of different factors. Whether or not workers accept their bosses and exploitation depends on such factors as the strength of revolutionary influences, political traditions, levels of poverty etc.

Another version of this argument is that the working class has “sold out” to consumerism and has become moderate because of its “improving living standards”. In fact, poverty and inequality in the First World have always remained high, and have in fact been steadily increasing since the end of the post- World War Two capitalist boom. The capitalist system is unable to deliver to the needs of the masses in order to “buy them out”.

For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) at the start of the 1980s, the top 10% of the population received 23.9% of total income while the bottom 10% received only 2.5%. The top 10% of the population also owned four fifths of all personal wealth, and 98% of all privately held company shares and stocks. The top 1% itself owned 80% of all stocks and shares. Meanwhile the bottom

²⁰ G. Purchase, (1993), “Rethinking the Fall of State-Communism,” in *Rebel Worker: Paper of the Anarcho- Syndicalist Federation*. 12 (9). Australia. pp. 15–6.

²¹ see Class War, (1992), *Unfinished Business: The Politics Of Class War*. AK Press and CWF. p83; Mark McGuire, (1993), “Book Review Corner,” *Rebel Worker: Paper Of The Anarcho- Syndicalist Federation*. 12 (6). Australia.

80% of the population owned just 10% of the personal wealth, mostly in the form of owning the house they live in. These economic inequalities correspond to material deprivation and hardship. A study published in 1979 found that about 32% of the population of the UK (15–17.5 million out of a population of 55.5 million) was living in or near poverty. A 1990 United Nations survey of child health in the UK showed that 25% of children were malnourished to the extent that their growth was stunted.²²

The argument that class struggle ignores non-class forms of oppression such as racism and sexism and must therefore be replaced by the so-called “**new social movements**” based on single issues such as women’s rights, anti-racism and gay rights is also wrong.

We support, defend, and work within the “new social movements.” But this should not blind us to their very real limits as agents of revolutionary change.

We need to recognise that these movements generally contain, and are dominated by, middle and upper class elements (and ideas) bent on hi-jacking them to win a better place at the top of the capitalist heap as “politically correct” bosses. Such elements have a vested interest in capitalism and the State that makes them unable to attack these forms of oppression at their roots.

In addition, the “new social movements” are often built around small minorities: gays, racial minorities in the First World and so on. It is difficult to see how such small groups can overturn capitalism and the State. The working class on the other hand makes up the majority of every society on this planet. In addition, these classes include the majority of the people who make up the “new social movements”.

As noted above, class struggle does not ignore racism, sexism etc. These are part of the class struggle. Therefore multi-class movements of specially oppressed groups can not defeat those special oppressions, however good their intentions.

What we need to do is to work in or with the “new social movements” to develop class politics in these organisations (with the obvious exception of political parties), to expel the opportunist mis-leaders and to link these struggles and organisations to the trade union movement and other workers struggles (e.g. around rent boycotts).

It is wrong to pretend that anarchism is not an ideology of class struggle. Anarchism emerged in its modern form in the federalist wing of the First International Working [Men’s] Association and in the twentieth century developed in the direction of Anarcho-syndicalism (or anarchist / revolutionary unionism). All the classic anarchists (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus, Malatesta, Goldman, Berkman, Makhno, Archinov, Maximov, Rocker, Durruti etc. etc.) believed in the centrality for class struggle even where they dealt with issues such as decolonisation (e.g. Bakunin)²³ and women’s rights (e.g. He Zhen, Emma Goldman, the Mujeres Libres anarchist women’s group in Spain).²⁴

²² Figures for the UK from Robert Lekachman and Borin van Loon, (1981), *Capitalism for Beginners*. Pantheon Books. New York, esp. 44–5, 67, 70. and *Class War* (1992), *Unfinished Business: The Politics Of Class War*. AK Press and CWF, p. 77. For the USA see Lind, Michael, *The Next American Nation*, cited in “Stringing up the Yuppies”, (24 September 1995), *Sunday Times*, p14; *Business Week* which estimated in 1991 36 million Americans (15% of the total population) were living in poverty; and *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 1992.

²³ see D. Geurin, (1971), pp. 67–9

²⁴ see the references for Mujeres Libres given above; for Emma Goldman see P. Marshall (1993), *Demanding The Impossible: A History Of Anarchism*. Fontana. London. pp. 403–9;), p279.; also P. Zarrow, 1988, “He Zhen and Anarcho-Feminism in China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 47 (4); also see M. Molyneux, 1986, “No God, No Boss, No Husband: Anarchist Feminism In Nineteenth Century Argentine,” in *Latin American Perspectives*, 13 (1)

TO SUM UP

1. class is a form of exploitation and domination that affects the vast majority of people in the world today
2. only the working class produces social wealth
3. only a productive class can destroy capitalism and the state and create a free society because only a productive class does not need to exploit or benefit from the current system.
4. in addition, the fact that the working class produces all value gives our class enormous power to fight its oppressors by means of workplace action. Working class organisation is facilitated by the concentration of workers in large workplaces
5. class is not the only form of oppression but all forms of oppression are rooted in the capitalist/ State system and can therefore only be permanently destroyed by a working class revolution. At the same time, the class struggle can only win if it consistently opposes all forms of oppression. In addition, class position modifies the experience of other forms of oppression, thus underlining the need for a class perspective. It follows that the fight against special oppression can only succeed on the basis of class struggle, whilst the class struggle can only succeed if it opposes all special oppressions.
6. Only the working and poor people can destroy the root cause of all oppression because only they do not have an interest in preserving the system. The class struggle can only win on the basis of opposing all forms of oppression.
7. Only class struggle and revolution can genuinely change society

NOTES

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